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THE ADVENTURES
of
YOUNG MAVERICK

by
Hervey White

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HERVEY WHITE
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CANTO I

My kingdom for a reader! As for horses,
I have a dozen: of the hobby breed,
Come with me and I'll put them through their courses,
An easy chair is all the coach you need,
A pipe and glass were very well indeed,
Unless, I beg your pardon, you're a lady,
A cigarette might come within your creed,
Though many think the custom somewhat shady,
Not being yet in vogue with Mrs. J. O'Grady.

No matter what your sex, or what your drinks,
I make my bow, and give you hearty greeting.
If any of you somewhat coldly thinks
My manner too familiar for first meeting,
Already meditating on retreating,
One word: I'm shy. This boldness is all bluff.
Make not my modesty my own defeating,
Bear with me, and you'll find me tame enough,
A little dull at times, but seldom really tough.

We used to always call our reader gentle,
A quaint old fashion, and yet very pretty,
It did not quite refer to aspect mental,
Nor was it faint attempt at being witty,
Old gallantry is past now, more's the pity,
The compliment implied of gentle birth,
But now the rule of money and of city
Has swept gentility quite off the earth,
And made plutocracy; whatever that is worth.

That's hobby number one. You see I'm mounted,
And scarcely finished making you my bow,
Such expedition you had hardly counted,
I did n't mean to do it even now;
I can't control my actions quite somehow,
The horse stood ready, and you gave attention,
A little patience surely you'll allow,
I'm off! Hooray! I suffer no detention,
It is too late for you to contemplate prevention.

I greet you then, O plutocratic reader!
Politeness can't admit the vulgar mass.
Good form requires that you should be a bleeder
Of that old goat known as the Working Class.
The theme is odorous? Then let it pass,
You have your carriage and your Paris clothes,
A little cultivation would, alas,
Be more becoming to your lifted nose,
But that will come with time and patience I suppose.

You ask, perhaps, who I am, which is proper,
Or would be were it not I am a poet.
Jehovah never seems to care a copper
About our social lines; if you must know it.
He keeps quite independent, and must show it
In solecisms one would think he'd spare us.
We do protest, but have to let him go it,
He being of that species, homo rarus,
Who has no boss, or wife, for which the saints prepare us.

At least you're pleased to find I am religious,
And do the best I can to smooth things over.
O'ercoming possibly the crime prodigious
Of being born not like a hog in clover,
My father was a humble Western drover,
You're pleased I'm sure to see me here so easy
Beside you in the church like D in Dover,
I wonder why all clergymen seem greasy
In spite of stock and frock and ministration queasy.

Oh, yes, I go to church. At least I would
Had I not more important things to do.
I find, for working, there's no day so good
As Sunday; so I have to see things through.
Perhaps I was intended for a Jew.
Perhaps I am a changeling. Who can tell?
And all is mine which is possessed by you;
I like that little theory so well
I must pause to inhale the appetizing smell.

On Saturdays I always eat my fish,
A second instance of my faith in God.
To eat it Friday is my earnest wish,
But then the price is up: which does seem odd.
You'd think a piece of halibut or cod,
Being a staple article of diet,
Would not go bobbing like a piston rod;
Stock markets, I am told, are never quiet;
And when a thing is cheap I simply have to buy it.

Let's see! What else? I always dance in Lent,
That, you must know, is quite the latest fad.
For Easter Sunday all my cash is spent
On gloves that simply drive the fellows mad.
I know a trick in ties that's not so bad,
I took it from a count, once at a smoker.
He took from me all the spare change I had.
If I remember right the game was poker,
You see I know them all; even the money broker.

But if I were not clearly what I am,
The pink of all conventionality,
You really would not need to give a damn,
For poets often come of low degree.
They get their patent from that high decree
Already mentioned. Which, we must admit,
Seems somewhat queer to such as you and me,
As if thrown off in some abstracted fit
Approaching peevishness, when we would question it.

No matter; with the proper introduction,
I think we'll journey on like two good friends.
I offer you amusement and instruction,
While your plutocracy will make amends
For any little dullness that descends
So often with the dollars one inherits;
A compensation, doubtless, God intends
To cheer up those down trodden luckless spirits
Like me, who lack the gold, but have all other merits.

Here, just a little whisper on the side,
As in the gallant days it was intended,
In case some reader lacked patrician's pride,
But was from vulgar commoner descended,
And had not 'gentle' to his name appended,
Why, just so now, dear reader, if, by chance,
You lack that cash by which all woes are mended,
And only hold that native elegance
Which by all eyes it seems is marked upon first glance,

Why, if, alack, you work at some profession,
Or are a slave to a big corporation,
And only have as personal possession
A lively wit and liberal education,
Why, then, keep quiet in your situation,
Read unmolested, undisturbed by me,
I'll not despise you for your humble station,
Although, of course, you can't expect to see
Me give you nod and smile in such grand company.

I make my bow to money; that I must.
Poets have had their patrons in all ages,
And, though oft times, they scarcely had a crust,
Or else were kept like paroquets in cages,
There is a fame that all our hearts engages,
A recognition from the Ruling Class;
No vanity but that our thirst assuages,
No matter if the ruler be an ass,
We still must tune our harps to his sweet voice of bass.

That's all. That's honest. Now begins our story.
So fortify yourself with one more drink.
If sometimes it seems weak in martial glory,
Don't get disheartened; it will never sink
Into a question of mere printer's ink,
Like to the novels turned out in New York:
Dry carcasses that cannot even stink;
No more of that. For now we get to work,
And in I bear the babe; like the old fabled stork.

Young Maverick in the upland pastures lay
Woven as in the grass. While star-like flowers
Shaking their petals down in sweet array
Dappled his flanks with gentle breathless showers.
The thread green stems, tangled in bending bowers,
Their pollen plumes of dust closed over him,
Enwoofing through the drowse of summer hours
The pattern of his body, head, and limb;
His color of pale gold glowed as with sunshine dim.

His slender fetlocks cooled by violets
Relaxed the dusky ivory of his hooves,
Whereon faint shadows weaving minuets
Relieved in mimicry their flowers' loves.
His pasterns reveled in the denser groves
Of honey combed red yellow columbine,
Whose drooping crown the lily's pride reproves,
Concealing gold in faded analyne,
Old rose o'er gold that still with hidden gold doth shine.

His scarcely heaving belly daisies pied
With whiter white than down of his soft fell,
And golden coins they scattered on his side,
Laughing to see they favored him so well.
The buttercups gave, too, their golden spell,
While, high above, the blood red lilies stood
Holding their blazoned scutcheons up to tell
Here slept a foal sprung from ancestral blood,
Untainted issue of an acient royal stud.

His arching neck limned curves of wave-like motion
Flowing from out his withers and his breast;
As when the tossing turbulence of ocean
Is schooled to softer subsidence of rest.
His slim legs curved down gently in their nest;
While from his neck out floated the young foam
Of his soft mane into the daisies dressed.
Like other flower stems that have strayed and come
Into the wealth at length of their beloved home.

But who shall tell the beauty of his head?
Or, telling it, shall hope to be believed?
Like young bride poised with radiant, eager tread,
When first she cometh home to be received
Into the house her new lord hath bequeathed,
So stepped this graceful orchid from its stem,
Poised like corolla without calyx sheathed,
The flash of jeweled dewy diadem,
That all flowers bow before as sweet befitteth them.

The tender nostrils were scarce fluttering now,
So evenly the breath flowed in between
The leaf-like channels to the caves below,
And back again into the meadow's green.
Calm was the forehead; and the eyes unseen
Were fringed about with gentian; like deep wells
Where drooping of the summer grasses' screen
Is deepened by the blue of drooping bells,
And all is hushed to slumber drowsing where sleep dwells.

The pasture bed wherein our hero slept
Was curtained round with high o'erhanging hills;
Faint drift of cloud the upper valence swept
And silver cords of twisted twinkling rills
Swung down to brush the golden daffodils
Embroidered on the out tossed counterpane,
As mirthful merboy in carved fountain spills
The water that is blown in mist of rain
But with the warmth and splendor rises up again.

For canopy, the deep silk of the sky
Emblazoned with the symbols of the sun
In soft vibration fluttered airily,
Across which, dream white dragons swift would run,
Transformed to doves ere yet their course was done,
And doves were ships, and ships were women's hair,
Wind blown but never tiring in their fun,
They haunted the faint regions of high air,
And threw down dreams like flowers to the rapt slumberer
there.

And high above, but gleaming through the silk,
Hung the round sun, the burnished shield of Mars.
His rays consuming that pale opal milk
That floats forever down from myriad stars.
He laughs contemptuous of such puny wars,
And seeks a nobler champion in the earth;
Whose grim rocks, seamed and broken with old scars,
Shall yet give sun-rayed flowers in speedy birth,
A trooping brood of light to swift come dancing forth.

The sun, as well, has pricked our sleeping steed;
And quick he rises at a single bound,
While all the bowing flowers with sorrow bleed,
Though he has given them but scarce a wound.
They bend still lower to the sacred ground
Whereon his body left a glowing heat;
They crowd each other, gathering close around,
Catching the perfume and inhaling it;
For this incense to them is soul and body's meat.

Only the lilies flaunt their crimson flags
To herald the awaking of their king,
Waiting the echoes from the curtained crags
His hoof-strokes challenged with their vibrant ring.
The hovering zephyrs hush their whispering,
Awed to be near the place where he doth stand,
Embodiment of sunshine and the spring,
Apollo's steed, sprung down to touch the land;
His tail spread wide in air, pale flaming fire-brand.

His nostrils, wide spread now, are quick alert
To catch some scent of warning from the breeze.
His eyes are gleaming topazes, begirt
With bands of white, soft binding ivories;
His ears pricked forward, keen auxiliaries,
Strain with the rest to test the faintest sense,
Whether the message be to warn or please,
No matter, every muscle is drawn tense
To forward spring for joy, or back in swift defence.

For, since the autumn with the flying sun,
(Even the sun will fly with fear of cold,)
Scarcely a day had let its waters run
Without some danger's seeming to unfold,
Some new device his comrades had not told
Of tempting bait's allurements to ensnare;
Cunning of man in lust for gain of gold,
To seize this untamed spirit unaware
And break it in due time to ways of toil and care.

For, in the autumn past, when men had come
To round the herd up in the branding pens,
Our foal of sunbeams fearing some vague doom,
Had lain well hidden in the ferny fens.
His mother knew, perhaps, his finer sense.
She was a cream white filly, mountain born,
Herself scarce won from wild wood denizens
To nibble the enslaving bait of corn,
Or in the stall to stand, waiting the weary morn.

His sire was shipped from sands of Araby
To droop and wither in the mountain air.
Young Maverick was the single progeny
Of his waste loins dragged down by sick despair.
Soon he was dead; freed from his grief and care.
The cream-white filly galloped wide away.
Her heart was young, and all the world so fair;
She knew no grief. If some sweet sadness lay
Within her lingering thoughts, it bade her be more gay.

And when the pale gold foal to light was given,
Her memory was touched with mild surprise
To see that fire of light caught down from Heaven
Linger and flicker in the youngling's eyes;
So had it been in her dead Araby's.
But there 'twas waning; here 'twas waxing strong;
If it be grief to watch the light that dies,
'Tis joy to greet a birth with praise and song;
And 'twixt the two, in truth, move our brief years along.

So she had reared her nurseling tenderly,
And shielded him from watchful gaze of men,
Mindful of how the desert parent tree
Drooped when transplanted in the mountain fen.
So might they kill the offspring, if, again,
They sought to sell it into alien lands,
Casting it in the dusty prison pen,
Cutting its tender flesh with hempen bands,
And scarring its fair flank with fiery seething brands.

Thus he was left in ferny, golden grove
When the harsh drovers came with curse and shout.
Sharp strain for her poor panting mother love
To join alone in her companion's rout,
To miss his nuzzling nose her flanks about
And know that he was lying all alone
Beyond the reach of hasty drover's scout;
But what grim wolf might come while she was gone,
Leaving for her, returning, but a grisly bone?

Or if some stealthy mountain lion's tread
Should make him think his mother's hoof had broke
The snapping twig; and he should lift his head
Only to meet the fatal leap and stroke:
Already her fond heart all fears awoke,
And she would fain return and get him now
Had not the drover's stinging whip-lash spoke,
And made her plunge into the herd below,
Descending now, alas, the bending foot-hill's brow.

And all the other mothers gave her glance
Of scornful pity or of stern reproof.
The gentle geldings even looked askance
And kept their brothers' sympathy aloof.
They could not think Love hazarded such proof,
She surely sought the lordly stallion's glance,
Who, treading near her on proud lustful hoof,
Showed willingness to make the first advance,
Curving his neck with pride in grave, majestic dance.

But the sad mother, pained and pitiful,
Flashed out her teeth, and showed a fiery eye.
'A thin pretense!' said brood mares dutiful,
'Wait till we show her when she passes by!'
She gave them speedy opportunity,
Dashing into their midst to seek escape;
Whereat, each one withdrew as she came nigh,
Leaving an open passage-way agape
Through which Sir Libertine might contemplate his rape.

Sweet sense of virtue in the female breast!
Delicious shudder of self praising good!
How many matrons draw about their nest
The leaf-like curtains of their motherhood,
And turn deaf ears to hapless womanhood
Outside the boundaries battling with the storm,
Imagining their own strength has withstood
The winds; when 'twas their nest that kept out harm,
Biting of bitter frosts, and Hunger's wild alarm.

The cream white filly had a pair of heels
That lordly libertine might well respect.
So in among the geldings swift he wheels,
With jest he knows will ready have effect,
For impotence is eager to affect
A laughter at which knowledge is denied,
Thinking thereby to cover its defect,
And hide in bluster what it lacks in pride;
A sight more pitiable can hardly be descried.

The jest was relished and the laugh went round
As all trooped down into the rounding pen.
Even the sober matrons were not bound
To quite conceal their satisfaction when
Some bolder gossip told the joke again.
Of course, they answered with 'O fie's!' and 'Pshaw's!'
And said, such things were better left to men,
And sent their colts far off to play, because
There are some subjects only meant for wise mammas.

And then they came into the dusty yards,
Where sat the master on his steed of steeds,
Keen eyed, moustachioed, glancing thitherwards,
As the white filly through the gate-way leads.
He speaks but briefly; though each drover heeds:
'Where is her colt, the foal of Araby?'
To which the drover, humbly waiting pleads,
'I think, sir, 'twas the mountain lion's fee,
For when we found the dam, alone there wandered she.'

The master's eyes flashed anger out like fire:
'Think you, you knave, that white mare would survive?
That mountain lion gaining his desire,
Should bear the foal away, and she alive?
Open the gate, and let her outward drive;
And you, boy, follow her; and take good care
She give you not the slip.' Like bee from hive,
The anxious mother swiftly forth did fare,
Taking the upward hills, winging the buoyant air.

Long swinging leaps she took; spurred on by pain,
Blindly, not heeding stones or treacherous holes;
Stumbling at times, but catching stroke again,
Anxiety in trembling yet controls:
So flee the shadows of self-tortured souls
Who haste, and fall, and haste, in nervous dread,
Anticipating ever funeral tolls,
Forgetting that their bodies long are dead,
Borne on the wings of Fear with dark plumes weakly spread.

She took without a pause the upward cliffs,
Leaping o'er rocky seam and yawning chasm,
Up from whose phosphic caverns came faint whiffs
Of putrid poisons breathing rank miasm;
She did not heed the choking gasping spasm;
On, on, with snorting plunge, she kept her course,
Before her ever looming vague phantasm
Of wild beast's slaughter and the death cry hoarse,
Haunted by her own fate forewarned in fierce remorse.

And when, at length, she gained the ferny fen,
She gave one piercing, whinnying, tender neigh,
Trembling to think that, maybe, ne'er again
Her eyes should see the sun that made her day;
And when the foal, quick hearing where he lay,
Upstart at the call he loved so dear,
And bounding came to greet her on her way,
She fell all trembling, as o'ercome with fear,
Then sank down dead, without a parting moan or tear.

The youth sent out to follow, in due season,
Came to the spot where the dead mother was,
Much grieved, and speculating on the reason
She lay thus peaceful on the crumpled grass.
He did not know a shaft of joy could pass
Into the heart and leave it withering;
As lightning cuts the oak tree down, alas!
While flies away, with upward beating wing,
The free soul, knowing not Death's envious aspic sting.

He said the filly had but overdone:
Heart failure, as the doctors call it now;
To call it heart success were nearer on
The truth; as all but doctors will allow.
Then he set thinking and devising how
He'd drive the little whimpering nickering colt
Down to the valley ranche, to there avow
The thing had happened not through any fault
Of his; being far away, when fell the fatal bolt.

But the young sunbeam was not easy driven.
He skipped about around his mother's bier
As though flashed down from mirror out of Heaven,
Not to be fastened to this earthly sphere.
The youth attending to his lasso gear,
Forgot to veer his frightened courser round
The filly's body. And, o'erwrought with fear,
The good horse stumbled on a little mound,
Sending his rider rolling o'er the reluctant ground.

The youth, half crying through his threats and curses,
Ran to re clutch the broken bridle rein.
For, in the rules of ranging, nothing worse is
Than to lose seat; no matter what the pain.
The horse was quicker yet. And, up again,
He dashed off toward the ranche with bantering neigh,
The swinging stirrups maddening his brain
Seemed like the chase of Death, in wild affray,
Hot breathed and white, to mount and guide him towards
his prey.

The youth, at best, could only follow after,
Muttering, and stumbling over rocks and stones;
Fore relishing the jeers and merry laughter,
Wishing, almost, he had some broken bones,
So suffering for thoughtlessness atones;
As 'twas, he saw he'd have to stand the drinks
To celebrate his brush with Davy Jones;
And then, Don Pancho's gaze! Ah, that's what sinks
The heart of gasping drover, wondering what he thinks!

Alone, the golden colt, left with its mother,
Nips at the grass, all innocent of death.
For Birth is ever Death's own dearest brother,
And years must pass ere the breach wideneth.
The infant's gasp is like the dying breath.
What matter if the mother lay so still?
It is still water, so the proverb saith,
That lies most deep. If Love had all his will,
Birth, Death, and Life, God's deeps, would one same si-
lence fill.

So, gently played he: dabbling with the brooks,
Plucking the autumn flowerets by their heads,
Chasing cloud shadows into shady nooks,
Testing the mosses for their mattress beds,
Thus Time and Childhood weave their endless threads,
Until, at evening, when the herd returned
In the rich wealth of purples and of reds,
His play-mates' calls up through the twilight burned,
He joined them, well content. The mother never yearned.

And if, at first, he lacked the suckling's teat,
He found a way to steal such sustenance.
And, even in childhood, stolen sour is sweet,
And dangers risked give music for the dance.
The rainy winter came with swift advance,
And, deep within the covered hills, the herd
Found shelter from the winter's violence,
Far from the ferny fen, where no ghost stirred,
And haunting memories thence spoke not a single word.

But there was talk amongst the thoughtful mares
That this young scape-grace bore no legal brand.
They looked with pride on their own growing heirs,
Baptized with fire by sacred priestly hand;
They told of how in far off early land
There was a wizard, Peter Maverick,
Who gathered all the unclaimed in one band,
No doubt through some Satanic wily trick,
Creating for himself an anti-bishoprick.

For, if the world can have an antichrist,
Why not I pray, as well, an antibishop?
In horse world it is probably the nighest
They come to our more complicated dish up.
At all events old Maverick could fish up
Some sort of argument for evil doing;
Claiming, for his, all the good things we wish up
In our own private heaven we keep brewing,
Foreseeing, after death, a long eternal chewing.

At any rate the brood mares were concerned
For this young maverick without a master.
They called on all the geldings the most learned,
Provoked that their conclusions came no faster.
They could not meditate such dire disaster
As doubting anything that sounded collegey;
Though feminine impatience is a plaster
To force a head on any kind of knowlege, she
Soon gave this up as being merely terminology.

For how can geldings, gelded, still beget?
And how can scholars, schooled, foretell the future?
Through training their dull eyes are backward set.
Why look for nerves in some old rotting suture?
Napoleon, encountering his Blucher,
Did not sit down and study Marathon.
I own the illustration scarce will suit your
Fastidiousness; but then my rhyme were gone.
And, caught in rhyming shallows, I must sail head on.

How often wise professors in their physics
Have pointed out how flying was absurd,
Only to be upset by some shrewd skeesics
Who never thought to take them at their word.
Doubtless the ignoramus had not heard
Of all their weighty weary explanations
How man could never hope to be a bird,
O'ercoming Isaac Newton's gravitations,
The rarer media, and other like vexations.

Still, I suppose, professors must profess;
Especially in the things they do not know.
Society would all too quickly guess
The riddle if but once she were let go.
Then set the breaks and let her drive more slow.
We must not reach Millennium too soon.
'Twere shameful pity to give Greece a blow,
And drive her aged goddess to the moon,
Dancing in dynamite some classic rigadoon.

Before we leave the subject, altogether,
I can't resist, though, one fling at that fowl
Scratching in dung hills to inform us whether
We have or have not an immortal soul.
Unlike his predecessor, the wise owl,
He crows aloud his one word, Evolution,
Which, when interpreted, is but avowal
There's no unravelling the blind confusion,
And so the soul flies free in spite of his pollution.

For what's the use of science in religion?
It has its uses, doubtless, elsewhere.
To state one's preference for pig to pigeon,
Is not to prove there is no buoyant air.
If they prefer the mud, why, leave them there!
So much for dunghills, and so much for science!
We'll back again to our much puzzled mare,
And leave the matter to the schools' alliance,
Bidding them our good day, and our defiance.

The geldings, after talking matters over,
Decided that the youngster was a sport.
Not of that kind that makes the world its lover,
But of the scientific Darwin sort.
He was the other, too. That's why, in short,
We chose him for our hero. But please wait;
Remember, now we stand in Learning's court,
And be not ever here importunate,
'Tis always Learning's way to dally at the gate.

They counseled it were better to do nothing;
To let the matter rest, and wait for Time
To close the breach with necessary stuffing,
As she will do in least congenial clime.
Nor could the mares oppose this thought sublime.
They let the colt run with their sons and daughters.
Which, even had they thought it a great crime,
He would have done: although that little matters;
For childhood's ceaseless play is like the flow of waters.

Not so, however, at the Spanish rancho;
They would not leave the colt to run unclaimed.
The ever watchful, ever keen Don Pancho
Rebuked his drovers making them ashamed:
'Bring in the colt. But look it be not maimed;
No hurt or blemish,' said he, 'anywhere,
And I will have the lucky captor named
For a new saddle from the store's fresh ware;
We'll choose the best there is and call the matter square.'

And thus it was the watchful ones were ready
With every shrewd device a ranchman knows
To snare the little wildling, ever steady
In his determination not to close
With any bargain thrust beneath his nose.
If they had joined together in the foray
He had been easy victim, I suppose,
But, eager for the saddle and the glory,
Each man worked on alone. Hence come our song and story.

Behold, we see him, then, in June's fair pasture,
Unscarred, untouched by any human hand,
Free from the ownership of any master;
For so the law reads in that Western land:
A yearling running without mark or brand
Belongs to no one. He who can may take him;
May shoot him dead without a reprimand,
Or better, slightly cripple him, and break him;
His Property henceforth: so the range law doth make him.

But, until branded, he's a maverick.
I hope you will excuse the repetition.
I want the meaning in your mind to stick,
So I insist upon the definition.
You see, 'tis a precarious condition,
For freedom ever is beset with dangers;
One works his way and pays a big tuition
In that great school where all the world are strangers,
And rules are strict, as well as with the Western rangers.

Child of the sun and wind he stands as free
As flickering lights beneath his long dark lashes.
As zephyrs in his mane in threnody
Whisper their love in fairy fitful flashes,
Or giant lightning in the pine top crashes.
Free in the zephyr, or the hurricane,
In leaping flame, or fluttering of pale ashes,
Free as was brotherhood before young Cain
Dealt Abel that foul blow, precursor of all pain.

How beautiful he stands! Thrilled with emotion,
Expectant, eager, filled with joy and fear,
Flash of pale foam on life's unconscious ocean,
Half in the future, half still hovering here,
That trembling betwixt laughter and a tear
Fluttering upon fair April's petal cheek,
That pause before the words 'I love' come clear
From breathless lover daring yet to speak,
And having spoken finds his strength grown strangely weak

So stands Young Maverick on his liltng limbs,
Catching the air with nostril ear and eye,
Till all the valley in his spirit swims
Like vision in a glass of destiny.
Then sweet calm settles with a soothing sigh.
He knows the herd is coming up the slope,
Will in due season reach the passes high,
No fear tonight of cunning coil of rope,
Fresh snare of watchful man with which his fears must cope

Gaily he canters toward a rocky ledge
By which his boon companions must arrive.
The flowers dance with him to the very edge,
The grasses in his footsteps leap and thrive,
A faint sweet murmur like a happy hive
Comes up from all the grass folk on the plain.
The very stones and pebbles seem alive
And chatter as his hooves leap up again,
Then settle back content filled with their glowing gain.

His wistful whinny calls an echoing note
Back from the voices of the waiting rocks,
Like wood thrush answering with eager throat
The song his mate with her spring love unlocks.
The gurgling rills hush all their throbbing clocks
By thrusting rushes in the channel's course,
Muffling the waterfall's concussion shocks
With winds that touch them with such soft remorse
They drift like mourning veils bereft of life and force.

Then comes the herd up trooping through the passes,
The yearlings on ahead in sportive play,
A gallant company of lads and lasses,
Free from restraint of elders far away,
Like to the rosy clouds of coming day
Who know the sun awaits them on the hills,
Flushed with emotion at his first faint ray,
Till suddenly his sight their splendor fills,
And the gray earth all glows with the deep joy that spills.

They greet their playmate with a shrilling chorus
That startles the far outward rising peaks.
But lower cliffs take up the sound sonorous
Applauding with a thousand whinnying squeaks,
Young Maverick, too, his answering echo speaks,
And canters toward them with such gracious sweetness
They quite forget their little clans and cliques,
And feel their mutual love with calm completeness,
Like swift firm river's flow bound by its very fleetness.

They meet, they shower on him their soft caresses,
Swift, furtive, tender, like the love of youth,
A touch, a glance, a breath, a word that blesses,
Deeper than long confessions of Love's truth,
I know not anything so sweet, in sooth,
As childish Love's first chaste virginity,
Free from all morbid after haunting ruth,
Flash of the moment, sunshine on the sea,
When skies are overcast and waves toss gloomily.

How all of us have watched young children play
When we unknown to them stayed in the gloom,
Perhaps a window open to the day,
Where we sat prisoned in some alien room,
Their prattle floated in like sweet perfume
Of orchards long forgotten in our cares,
Filling the sordidness with gracious bloom
That covered up our heartache unawares
And bore us back to God, and humble childish prayers.

Now these mild yearlings, intermingling, weave
A changing pattern in the troop's advance.
Dapple of silver-gray and white relieve
The sombre blacks and browns, and them enhance.
The bay's rich red gives tone and elegance,
The chestnut-sorrels flash a golden glow,
The red roans give pale contrast in the dance,
And threading in and out, half gold half snow,
Young Maverick's back and mane like fluttering lilies blow.

Their tramp is of a thousand beating hearts,
Hearts of the happy when youth's blood leaps high.
Their eyes are like the fires that Cupid starts,
Kindled with sunshine caught from out the sky.
Their noble heads are their own heraldry.
Their hoof strokes like good coin give out clear ring
As on the level mesa high and dry
All with one impulse break to galloping,
Leaping like flowerets out into the wealth of spring.

They pause when they have reached an open summit,
A wide arena on a sanded knoll
On which, had Heaven dropped descending plummet,
'T would prove the centre of that mountain bowl.
Like clouds afar the snowy peaks did roll
Into the overland of ice and snow,
Barrens of purity for untried soul,
But where no flesh and blood will care to go,
Congealed virginity no mortal ought to know.

But nearer by, and shutting out this cold,
The foot-hills hung their heavy tapestries;
Calm as the peaks were they, and quite as old,
But blessed with rich experience of trees,
The wild birds sang therein their melodies,
And eft-like things crept in and out the moss,
And winging flights of golden honey bees
Swept down the sheltered valley wide across,
Whose floor took on in gain what the hills gave in loss.

The yearlings now are marshalled for their play.
Young Maverick is leader of the ring.
Ranged in wide circle, all alert are they
To catch the call of his first challenging.
He gallops to the centre, whinnying,
Then round and round the wheel begins to turn,
Slowly at first, with gentle even swing,
Then faster, as enthusiasms burn
So fast that gray from bay one scarcely can discern.

Then, with a scream of maddening delight,
He dashes, too, into the whirling rim.
Like swimmer, with bared body gleaming white,
Shouting to feel the whirl-pool over him,
Round, round, like fleck of foam upon the brim,
He urges speed with swift increasing stride,
The very dizziness makes light grow dim,
Till force centrifugal is overtried,
And bursting in wild wreck the atoms whirl aside.

Like flowers that envious April holds in keeping
Within her apron, chilled with lingering frosts,
Until May's rogueish cupids catch her sleeping,
While heralding the coming Pentecost,
In contemplation blank they first are lost,
Then, drawing with a shout their golden bows,
Till fiery arrows every thread have crossed,
And gaping rents the precious wealth disclose
Of quince and almond's blush and paling tuber-rose,

And then when April, waking, sees mishap,
And starts up weakly as from some vague dream,
And views the wanton riot in her lap,
And flies the hills across, o'er wood and stream,
How all the drunken cupids dance and scream
To see the flowerets rolling everywhere!
Her very foot-prints are with white agleam!
And, look! Advancing through the vacant air,
Dawns the faint form of May, the fairest of all fair;

So, like to all those scattered flowerets sweet,
These yearlings gather in fresh fragrant groups,
Poising, and rallying on breathless feet,
Ingathering the tangent-taking troops,
Except Young Maverick, who never droops,
But true to circle as to physics' law
He still whirls on in steadier, speedier loops
Like fierce haired comet, vacuum cannot thaw,
Startling the satellites with gaseous yawning maw,

Round, and still round the sandy circle fleeting,
Feet locking and unlocking with precision,
But thrilled with life, as of a true heart beating,
Not like cold steel of clever mechanician,
We would not hold mechanics in misprision,
But life is still more wonderful than death,
And ever we're enraptured with the vision,
Perfection, that the heart yet quickeneth,
Singing the song of life with steady flowing breath,

Round, round he races, with thin nose extended,
With neck outstretched like arrow, speeding on,
His back laid level, scarce a line is bended,
His legs, alone, a swift automaton;
Behind, before, in steady unison
Beating the breathless, gaping atmosphere,
Winged like the wheeling screaming pelican,
Without a pause, without a swerve or veer,
Force for the nebula of some new forming sphere,

Until, like flotsam drifting in the eddy,
The other colts are sucked into the swirl
Of the great maelstrom swinging ever steady,
Wavering and wishful like a timid girl;
But once she feels her lover's strong arms curl
Around her waist, her feet are like young flames,
Winged in the dance, in wide pavilion's whirl,
Forgetful of all stations, places, names;
So they are charmed again in childhood's 'wildering games.

And once again the hollow earth resounds
With the fierce throbbing of a thousand feet.
And once again the circling air astounds
The gentle zephyrs coming in to greet;
And they, too, join the maddening whirlwind fleet,
Forgetting, all alike, their lord's commissions,
Caught in the fervor of the cyclone's heat,
Licked by the flames of fiery, frenzied passions,
Dancing like dervishes in weird fanatic fashions.

Again, the climax reached, the tissues burst;
Again the atoms scatter in recoil;
But, in the dust, e'en fresher than at first,
Circles the golden bird in constant coil,
No fleck of foam as yet his plumes to soil,
No smirch or stain upon his shining coat,
Free as a spirit from the earth's turmoil,
Light as a butterfly to gaily float
Over the waters wild hurled from the chasm's throat.

Again repeating, and again entrain,
The scattered atoms round the force all gather,
To be thrust off and then drawn in again,
Thrust off, drawn in, lashed into milk-white lather;
The Sun grows weary of the contest, rather,
And hides his sleepy eyes behind Night's curtain,
Content that child is worthy of its father,
That, of all creatures his wide sight can girt in,
This foal is champion: that is acknowledged certain.

Therefore, he hangs a yellow banner free,
Enmeshed with spangles of translucent light,
On which is blazoned the sire's heraldry,
The golden crescent, the sweet Queen of Night;
No star, as yet, has twinkled into sight,
Alone, the slender horn hangs soft in air,
Bathed in the roseate glow of yellow light,
Pledge of the Arab sire and mountain mare,
And still their foal speeds on, and so we leave him there.

Calm of the evening, gentle as the smile
Of some great angel fresh from Paradise,
Breathe on us now for yet a little while
The fragrant air from golden desert skies!
Let us, the moment, hear thy symphonies;
And list the melodies of moon and sun,
Planets of Life's and Death's eternities,
Chant of the ages, which have ne'er begun,
And ne'er will end the race, but ever onward run.

CANTO II

Perhaps 'twere fitting to make some apology
For taking readers all so far afield,
Away from cities and their criminology
Into the crudeness mountain deserts yield;
Then, too, my humble birth must stand revealed,
For how could I, if nurtured a patrician,
Know of these things from gentle folk concealed,
Unless, indeed, I were some sage magician,
A trade that now-a-days will scarce get recognition.

Let me then humbly here at once confess
Myself of that vile species called clod-hopper;
Son of the soil from out the middle West,
Whose wildest dreams of gold have turned out copper—
I would not for the world say aught improper,
If I but knew what was propriety;
But how can you expect to put a stopper
Into a mouth of my variety
Uncouth, untrained by any good society?

Forgive me then, dear reader, and forbear,
If I should sometimes say what I ought not.
'Tis all through ignorance, I gravely swear;
I have the greatest reverence for that rot
You call good breeding, though you have it not,
The pith and substance of your very being,
That makes you seem a saint when you're a sot,
A moral one, I mean; so, now agreeing,
We'll journey on together; seen, I trust, and seeing,

Another thing that wilts a would be poet
Is, he is often hard pressed for his rhymes;
'Tis best, in the beginning, you should know it,
'Twill help you're understanding him at times.
He often speaks of dollars, meaning dimes,
Forgive, I pray, the vulgar illustration;
I did not mean on setting out, betimes,
To give this thrust at your most sacred station,
And sound the underpinning of your whole foundation.

No: poets must be driven by their muses;
Nine of them, like a very cat-o'-tails.
And if, flat out, Melpomene refuses,
Such being oft the case with all females,
To give the word we ask with prayers and wails,
There's nothing for it but to close our eyes,
To jib or luff our idly flapping sails,
To take a new tack, which, if not pure lies,
Is, at the best, I fear, a doubtful compromise.

Enough of poets: though a word on cities,
Before, unto our tale, we hurry on.
It were, indeed, a thousand, thousand pities
If we should slight that modern mastodon,
Pre-post historic world phenomenon,
I'm sorry I can think of nothing bigger,
New York will scarce o'erlook the damage done
In giving her such paltry, sorry figure,
Chicago, standing by, to ever twit and twig her.

We love her though. We love dear old New York.
Not quite because she swallows all our money;
Nor, yet, because of that faint smell of pork,
(Against her creed to eat it: which is funny.)
The lard, perhaps, exudes when warm and runny
From out her pores. They linger, those stale fats,
Soaked in through German generations sunny,
In stuffing future sausage Astorcrats,
To set the style for us in trousers and in hats.

But whom we love, we chasten; like the Lord.
Cite for us, if you can, more high example.
Not that he claims a patent in his word,
'Tis not our plan on any rights to trample.
We only hold it out to you as sample
To show we stand within authority;
And, having now made explanations ample,
We'll reinforce with extra simile,
Till all of you, at length, with us do well agree.

Take first that highest love of man and wife:
Did she not swear. 'love, honor, and obey'?
And when a woman swears, now, on your life,
You know she means whatever she may say;
With men, of course, 'tis quite the other way,
But, if we have established that one point,
Which is, the woman loves, haste on I pray,
Nor stop, man's wounded vanity to oint
Setting the argument, thereby, all out of joint.

The wife, then, loves. We love her for that love,
And leave the husband to his chastening.
We would not think, her action to reprove,
That is her privilege, earned by promising,
He learns the truth of 'Death, where is thy sting!'
First of the benefits of being married.
She has her satisfaction, and her fling,
And though, at times, both seem a trifle harried,
We would not dare to hint, their wedlock had miscarried.

No: we're conservative. Say what you will,
We still stick to that sacred institution
Of tying Gill to Jack, and Jack to Gill,
For life, for death, Hell, Heaven, dissolution:
Eternity can't dodge our resolution,
God made it so, you know you can't deny it,
And we made God: see Spencer's Evolution,
And now it's done, we're going to stand by it;
As for rebellion, well, we'd like to see you try it.

The women are the ones who try it most.
What woman ever could withstand a dare?
We like to think they do it at their cost;
Though facts won't bear us out: not everywhere.
We bide our time, unwilling to despair;
Meanwhile, we get a little welcome rest:
Take out our old pet vices for the air,
Chat with a friend, and say all's for the best;
A consolation sweet that stands most any test.

The trouble with the women is, God bless them,
They're marching out under the open sky.
Some people think the Devil doth possess them,
But that's not our point. Never mind now why.
Not that we're sure they march to victory;
Sufficient for the moment that they march,
And, if they like it, who are you and I
To say they shall not try for Triumph's arch,
E'en though, in building it, they must tear down a church?

But when, to us, they seem the least judicious
Is, judging men by their own woman's code.
It never has been ours; nor now our wish is
To undertake that strait and narrow road.
Too many rich fields are spread out abroad;
'Tis not our will, or wisdom to neglect them.
We reap the harvests where the grain was sowed;
Grateful for gifts, and loyal to protect them,
Nor is it our least thought to stupidly reject them.

But woman, judging from her womanhood,
Just where she got it we'll not now discuss,
Forbids all things that are not for her good,
And, in her rage, gets doubly virtuous;
Poor matrimony soon is all a muss;
The man's fault, too, that as a thing of course,
She makes the wound, is shocked to see the pus,
Leaps on her virtue's very highest horse,
And if not alimony, seeks, at least, divorce.

Well, let her go; perhaps she will come back
When she has regulated all the laws.
Perhaps she'll find another town to sack,
For towns are many for young Freedom's cause.
What's good for braves may not be good for squaws;
We'll change the proverb of the goose and gander;
'Tis woman made and doubtless has its flaws.
The fire has still for us its salamander,
A woman's form, you know, to tempt us to philander.

So, husbands, take your punishment, and smile;
And, cities, take yours, too; you well are able.
And if it seems to you our caustic bile
Smacks of the feminine, from out its Babel,
Why may we not, for once, just turn the table?
And though we are a he, and you, a she,
Reflect, it is the times that are unstable,
And women take the seats where men should be,
And men get dazed, at times, and scream hysterically.

But now, phenomenon that's always curious,
We have you well prepared for a good scolding,
We find, we do not feel the least bit furious,
But rather, in our loving arms enfolding,
The metaphor, we fear, is hardly holding,
Must crack, indeed, if not outright must burst,
Unseemly sight to all who are beholding,
For both of us are at our very worst,
All through the fault, beside, of being badly versed.

So, we will love you; being our whim to do so,
When women love the most, look out for scratches.
We'll love your vices, even. Though to view so,
Is not, I fear, just where the little catch is.
What if there is some brimstone on your matches?
They make for that the quicker, cleaner blaze.
A little splutter, and a few burnt patches
Are not to set our horrors all agaze;
Condemning naughty games, and censuring naughty plays.

Speaking of plays, 'tis not because they're naughty,
But rather that they are not anything
That makes us feel toward them a trifle haughty,
Stale pap prescribed by managerial ring;
Those fat necked drummers manage everything
That can be turned to money in their pants;
Art, Literature, and Music have no wing
To fly beyond their smoking, guzzling grants;
Or, having it, perforce fly far to foreign France.

Why is it that a people of intelligence,
New Yorkers all assume they're the elect,
They certainly do dress with some cheap elegance,
In borrowed clothes from Paris, I suspect:
But grant, for argument, their intellect,
How is it that they're led round by the nose
Where any advertiser may direct,
To pay their money, and show off their clothes,
And set their sage approval on the thing that goes?

All that the advertisers need to say
Is, everyone is reading this new book,
Away they run on that same very day
To their department store to have a look;
They see the crowd, the bait, but not the hook;
They bite, they buy, they read, all in a minute,
Not stopping once to see they have mistook
The advertiser's notice for what's in it,
That 'tis the same old tune played on the same old spinet.

One reason for this folly, and the main one,
Is that all of the buyers, to a man,
Are women; if the bull may prove a plain one:
I'll state it better if I find I can.
Already I am struggling with the van
Of fierce denial that this thing is true.
You see I know the arguments, and plan
Of your campaign more than you think I do,
And am prepared to meet them with my plans for you.

The women buy the books. I say again
If not themselves performing the transaction,
They hint what they would like unto the men
And get the thing they're after to a fraction.
If man should undertake through his free action
To buy a book, and read it for himself,
He must consider in the first reaction
'Twill have to lie on table or on shelf
For wife, for daughter, sister, ever a common pelf.

Result, he does not buy. But, at the club,
Will talk things over if there's one who cares
To listen to this literary grub
Who deals in non-negotiable wares;
But oftener his hearer sits and stares.
He is too busy with his making money,
Or losing it, which still less leisure shares,
For talk of literature on matrimony,
While for humanities, the very word sounds funny.

So, women rule; and think it is their right
To do so: as they always did, in fact.
It may be, when they've reached Parnassus' height,
At present, they're but in the riot act;
They do show sometimes taste, and often tact,
Praising an author who is young, romantic,
Who is by classics and the critics backed,
And gives them happy ending of love frantic,
With other fol-de-rol, and literary antic.

But women, first of all must be in fashion.
That is their nature: they must run in droves.
To lead, of course, is worth the wasting cash on,
No matter if 'tis but in length of gloves.
To stand alone there's hardly one who loves
To do it for the right of her opinion;
And advertisers, wise in ways of doves,
Make sound of thousand wings with wind-mill pinion,
Throw out some musty corn, and rule the whole dominion.

The writers, then, like shrewd, hard headed farmers
Produce the grain and fruit most quickly grown;
Concerned more with their catchy selling charmers
Than with the quality of seed that's sown.
Most of them have no land they really own;
They rent a little garden not too dear,
Throw on the fertilizer, that, a loan,
Produce the greatest seller of the year,
And let the advertisers take the gold, I fear.

They do not know, they have not even heard
That writing may be, and has been an art.
If when in high school they did catch a word
To that effect, 'twas but a poor spent dart
That wounded not, nor left the slightest smart;
They prosed along with Shakespeare and with Scott,
Learned a few passages to say by heart,
Which, after examinations, were forgot;
Then out they went prepared to try the author's lot.

But, notwithstanding them, and their editions,
It still remains a comfort to our souls,
That writing is an art, true to traditions,
Though not for them its lofty music rolls.
There is a law of beauty that controls;
And, while they're hacking for the magazines,
Who knows but some firm hand may seize the scrolls
And pen sweet words that picture magic scenes
Where men are kings of light and women are their queens?

Of course, the thing once done, our smart New Yorker
Would never know, till London told him of it.
He being of that type of biped porker
Who only sees his own immediate profit.
His hat is ready though, and he will doff it
Once he gets cue from some staid Englishman,
But poetry not franked, he can but scoff it,
It is the easiest way, the safest plan;
Mistakes are awkward things for leaders in the van,

The opera is a safer thing to judge,
That being shipped from Europe ready made.
One's sure of that; and does not need to budge.
Opinion given cannot be gainsayed
Why, only read, and see how much we've paid!
It's all first class; so give it good applause.
Besides, your jewels are so well displayed;
And other charms, not mentioned here, because
'Twould put me in the reach of moral censor's claws.

Then music has the human interest,
For singers and musicians lead such lives!
'Twould give the dullest entertainment zest
To tell who are their husbands and their wives.
The advertiser, too, at this connives,
And gives out doubtful rumors to the papers,
To keep the gossip going he contrives
All sorts of scandals and unheard of capers
Urged on no doubt to this by jewellers and drapers.

Some think that chamber music's more respectable;
They read about it in the fashion books,
Then offer entertainment most delectable,
Where everybody sits on tenter hooks
For fear 'twill be discerned from word or looks
She does not understand what it's about.
Musicians have so many twists and crooks,
'Tis very difficult to make them out;
And these are world famed artists, that is past a doubt.

The men don't mind so much if they are caught
In ignorance about this tweedle-deeing;
They say as much when the champagne has brought
Their senses to an honest way of seeing.
So while their wives, alert, are refereeing,
They take the moment for a quiet nap;
They've been at work all day, poor dogs, decreeing
What shall be done in case that some mishap
To the financial market come like thunder-clap.

‘And, after all,’ they say, ‘these dainty fellows
Would never stand a minute in the pit.
When the bear growls and mad bull wildly bellows,
They’d be wiped out, there is no doubt of it.’
Still they’re content thus drowsily to sit
And let the tweedle-deeing have its show,
’Tis less exertion than to counterfeit
A conversation that has little go;
It costs more; but, you know, the women want it so.

So Music, like her sister, Poetry
Looks to an older land with gentle sighing,
And, with her gold, across the greeting sea,
The season over, we may see her flying.
Poor Poetry, unpaid, is slowly dying;
For wings of song, though in themselves immortal,
Need earthly nourishing, there’s no denying;
Our nightingale is else a mourning turtle
Weeping her love that’s dead before the Heavenly portal.

Painting, the darker sister, has a method,
As method has most every gay brunette,
Of binding round her sons the mystic ephod
That makes them proof to poverty or debt,
They always have a dollar for a bet;
And food of some kind always is at hand;
And ‘hand to mouth’ is no sad epithet
For them, who taste the flesh-pots of the land,
And pass them by with laugh and scornful waive of hand.

They are the artists who respect their art;
And consequently they are much respected.
They heed no handicap when at the start;
There is not one so poor or so neglected
Who may not dream that Heaven is reflected
From out his eyes onto his canvas dim;
Or, drawn in badly, cannot be corrected
Through patience, and the study of a limb
Foreshortened, as the model now is seen by him;

He works, he sings, he whistles and grows handsome,
Unconscious of the one as of the other,
He does not realize he pays a ransom
Impossible to any ordinary brother;
He sometimes half regrets his doting mother
Should see things differently from worldly eyes,
And plead with him his nobleness to smother,
Accept a clerkship and trust for a rise,
To be respectable, in short, if such within him lies.

For while he has respect, as I have said,
He never is respectable at all.
Respect is gained without another's aid.
Respectability is social;
He does not hear Society's proud call;
So she, perforce, must give him recognition,
He builds his house; puts plaster on the wall
With his own hands, with flourish of magician,
Singing his own self-praise, like inspired rhetorician.

This in his youth, before he feels the pressure
Of our commercialism called New York,
Before the publishers with cambric measure,
And fabled intellect like ancient stork,
Test his rich canvasses and call them work,
Whereas, they have been up to this time play,
They hint of money, which they sometimes fork
To artists, as an ox gets dribs of hay,
And then they grow quite haughty, sending him away.

In time, if he is weak, they have him down,
Painting their own ideals and not his.
Not their ideas; those they do not own,
For Nature deals not in anomalies;
They have a shifting standard, though, which is
Half vulgar, quite correct, the thing that goes,
The magazines are full of this cheap fizz
That's said to be champagne, but never flows,
And only leaves a stench next day within the nose.

Ah, those advertisements called magazines,
How many murders to their doors are traced!
You'd think their editors were kings and queens,
The men fat necked, the women flabby faced;
They bear the titles of true heirs displaced
By publishers, who hold these in cheap slavery,
Doling them out, sometimes, a little taste
Of stocks or shares or other miscalled knavery,
That to such sycophants no doubt seem passing savory.

There are those artists who are strong enough
To quite resist this plutocratic pull,
Who keep their youth, and rather like the rough,
Wild mountain pasture of the roving bull;
In time, 'tis said, one gets his belly full,
But by that time he may pass off as lion;
And wives of plutocrats, not quite so dull,
Throw out good gold to such eccentric scion;
His judgments, pictures, even oaths, they quite rely on.

'Tis ludicrous to see them dressed like dolls,
Bowling and smirking in the city manner;
White fronts, black backs, and all the fol-de-rols,
While Father is a carpenter, or tanner.
But ladies all agree to vote the banner
Of gentle breeding on their native merits;
In truth, real worth is not a bad japanner,
And artists ever are congenial spirits;
They know good food, as well, and all the brands of clarets.

In short, they take the city as they find it,
And all they find they know is merely sham;
No native growth of manhood stands behind it,
A smirk of London, Paris, Amsterdam,
Nothing American: their butcher's ham
Is even tricked out with a foreign seal:
Some coronet before not worth a damn
Now furnishes his lordship a good meal,
Though vulgar parent hogs still in New York must squeal.

But now enough of polished piggeries,
Enough of shams, and sham society!
Back to the mountain desert's fastnesses,
Borne on the winds that leap the tallest tree,
Wings of the wind our fancy's imagery,
Back till the snowy peaks around us swim,
Circling the greening wells of valleys free,
Lost in the swirling mists, or smiling dim,
As Love is seen through tears when Faith discovers him.

Don Pancho was a man of scanty words,
As men of resolution often are.
A fine, bold type of wild Creation's lords,
His keen, kind face without a flaw or scar
Of dissipation of his youth to mar;
A man of forty years, and still unwed,
Reserved in confidence, yet never far
In sympathy where wounded feelings bled,
A heart both kind and true, but tempered by his head.

He loved to rule, and brooked the rule of none.
His hirelings worshipped him, and feared alike.
His commendation warmed them like the sun.
His questions could a frigid terror strike
Into the half-breed conscience of low tyke
Who sought to cover up with lying smile
Some petty theft or carelessness belike.
But coward cunning knew no subtle wile
To circumvent his gaze even the briefest while.

There was one servant whom he held most dear,
Like to a son he held him in his sight.
His name was Marselino, and his clear
Dark eyes were filled with that white liquid light
The stars shake down from purple skies at night;
His hair was of the night where shadows rear
Their dusky screens against the vision's flight;
Or where the light dies out on marge of mere
Whose middle surface fades and flickers far and near.

The man and master often rode together
Out o'er the wide expanses of the range
Through the long summer of unchanging weather,
For hardly is the winter there a change,
Spring speeding on sad Autumn to derange,
Eternal blue of skies and flow of wind,
Sometimes a blast from snowy peaks makes strange
The tender face of Spring, and shows how thinned
Last Summer's flowerets are, like smiles where Love has
sinned.

Like spring and winter of their changeless clime
Were these two horsemen riding o'er the plains:
The man, just seasoned with the winds of time,
The youth, untouched by disappointment's pains;
The future heavy with imagined gains,
The present sweet with freshly flowing waters,
Green banks abrim from early rushing rains,
The laughter as of many sons and daughters
Before grim Jealousy their common friendship slaughters.

So now we see them riding on ahead
Intent on capturing the Arab colt.
Their little company they always led.
Gregorio followed next: a curly dolt
Riding a black horse called The Thunderbolt,
Curvetting, capering, and whirling round,
His back kept level, never giving jolt
To careless, laughing rider in his bound,
His fleet hooves playing games o'er the uneven ground.

Gregorio had a shock of bushy curls
Protruding from beneath his hat's great brim.
In spite of lavish gifts to all the girls,
There never seemed to be one lacking him.
He had a natty figure, plump, and trim,
A little fat, from laughing overmuch,
Or was it from the cream he loved to skim?
For milk this satyr ne'er was known to touch;
His boast was cream and kisses, cakes and cooks, and such.

He always had a merry song at heart,
And all his heart lay full upon his lips.
In saddle, or in bivouac, he would start
The love chants of those merry fellowships,
Twiddling his shirt-front with his finger-tips
In imitation of a mock guitar,
The other hand performing fretless slips,
His wide mouth bellowing themes of love or war,
Till echoes rang refrain in the wild canyons far.

Joaquin rode next: a thin, tall Indian, lank
With many winters on his beardless face.
His small, keen eyes ne'er from a peril shrank.
With but a word, he, ready in his place,
Stood, without occupying seeming space.
Should any younger hero enter in,
He never seemed to fear his own disgrace,
But let who would a reputation win,
And only when all failed, made ready to begin.

The closing of this little cavalcade
Was Carlos and Miguel, two dusk Apollos,
Who, chatting quietly, together stayed,
Skinning the ground like dark, low flying swallows;
They liked to take the gently dipping hollows
Riding full speed, and keeping hand in hand,
Then, breaking where the rising hill slope follows,
They joined, with shout, their comrades' greeting band,
To fall back once again upon the level land.

Their comradeship was never called in question
By master or companions in arranging
The daily tasks; and if, on first suggestion
It seemed they might be parted, quick exchanging,
Another would speak up, his plans deranging,
That these two might together still be kept;
It would have seemed like day from light estranging
Had any circumstance between them crept;
And all these simple folk most certainly had wept.

Their wives were sisters; and they shared together
A common household; and their children reared
In common love; each hardly knowing whether
His own child or his friend's was most endeared.
Authority of either one appeared
Quite equal, to the little growing minds;
Alike they both were loved, alike were feared;
Nor did the mothers show of envious signs
To make distinction rise, which young affection blinds.

Today, all hearts were happy. For the capture
Of any animal gives young men sport.
Even old thin Joaquin still knew that rapture,
Though, on his face, no joy would e'er report.
He would have made a great success at court,
Or playing poker, which is much the same;
Demeanor was, with him, a hostile fort,
Which shows no guns, nor lack yet of the same,
But leaves the world to guess the hazard of the game.

Gregorio gave huzzah when full in view
The herd of horses through the pass came out,
Proud stallion first as is his right to do,
Close followed by the humbler common rout,
The yearlings fringing all the sides about;
While in the rear, with wide suspecting eyes,
The shy Young Maverick, like a timid trout
That has some knowledge hooks lie under flies,
And much too cautious is at every bait to rise.

What his astonishment to see six men
Equipped with lassos partially concealed
Come riding upward toward his mountain glen
With purpose in each eye and hand revealed;
Joaquin, alone, saw neither horse nor field,
But broke out carelessly in some old song,
Whereat, the others, seeming quick to yield,
Joined in with chorus, riding slow along,
Don Pancho with the rest, lost in the sounding throng.

The horses felt at once the calm and cheer,
And scarce gave heed unto their masters' presence;
Some cropped the grass or bushes growing near,
And all grew gentle as tame flock of pheasants
Invaded by a strolling group of peasants;
All save Young Maverick, who, swift as light,
Darted across the intervening peasants
And in the thorn-tree disappeared from sight,
Extinguished like a star in the soft clouds of night.

Don Pancho gave no sign of oath or word
To show his disappointment at that trick;
No single muscle of his dark face stirred,
And yet a change went over him so quick
It made the heart of gay Gregorio sick;
For he was guilty of the first halloo,
And he was also most impolitic
In getting out his lasso in full view,
And, quite apart from that, he felt contrition, too,

For he had been the youth, the year before,
Who could not catch the colt, because he fell;
And now 'twas pressing on a much chafed sore
To furnish out a second tale to tell.
It would be told; he knew that very well;
And girls would laugh, and men would slyly wink,
And most of all he now must note the spell
That overcame his master. One would think
He suddenly were stone. Gregorio's heart did sink.

For if a sword had flashed beneath the sun
And cut the light from off Don Pancho's face,
It could not show more change than it had done
In this swift flash of gold across the place,
And all was sudden changed in one brief space,
A sternness as of steel was in his lips,
Of sympathy or softness not a trace,
And fear came over all, as when eclipse
Shadows the smoking sun and day in darkness dips.

I think that Arab sire were much beloved,
Or else his offspring had the magic fire
That leaves no casual looker on unmoved
Until it stirs the depths of his desire.
What is the fatal gleam that all admire,
And all give worship to in spite of reason,
Forgetting, for the moment all things higher,
To think things higher were committing treason,
Until the charm is passed, as all charms do in season.

Some people have that fatal flame within them
That maddens all it shines on, like the moon;
For I am sure those stories have truth in them,
How bodies warp and shrink and wither soon
Exposed beneath the tropic's lunar noon;
Or, if not true, they surely are symbolical
Of passions that engulf us in typhoon,
And other cyclones equally diabolical,
Leaving us doubly plucked both as to hair and follicle.

At all events, Don Pancho turned his horse
And gave his orders in a quiet tone,
Not doubting all opinions would endorse
The plan of action he had formed alone;
Gregorio, having reasons of his own,
Was first to turn away and take the lead.
Miguel and Carlos hoping to atone
For former carelessness, fell in with speed;
But Joaquin, lingered yet as though he scarce agreed.

Don Pancho's plan was to surround the grove
And drive the colt back to the quiet herd
Which Marselino would keep in close drove,
Ready to turn it at the given word
Back through the pass, and cage the wilful bird
High in the upland pastures; which, though wide
Were of familiar heath, and much preferred
By the young wildling now on the outside,
Free as the mountain deer, and fleeter in his pride.

Joaquin still lingered, and Don Pancho saw
He waited invitation to speak out.
But, to the master's pride, his word was law;
And now he could not brook this hireling lout
To tell him he was wrong; and turn about
The order given and now half obeyed.
Two generals were sure to end in rout.
Besides, he felt that were the case delayed
All plans were useless and the quarry widely strayed.

And so Joaquin was left to join the rest,
And ride in humble silence toward the wood.
Perhaps, he thought, it might be for the best;
Don Pancho could not well have understood;
Or would not, rather, even if he could:
For Joaquin's plan was simply, to return,
And come another day when matters should
Have calmed a little, and the colt should learn
They meant no harm to him with ropes and glances stern.

Don Pancho watched him pass with some compunction,
Suspecting that his plan might be more wise;
But who of us can check by stern injunction
Our vanity when wanton passion flies?
Who is there of us who so much as tries?
We let our wilful temper take its course.
And only when the ruin round us lies,
Do we perceive what diabolic force
Has winged us on to failure, suffering, and remorse.

The die was cast. The order had been given.
The thorn-tree grove was speedily surrounded.
The eager quest undoubtedly had thriven
Had vim and vigilance the matter bounded.
But Joaquin's fears now proved to be well grounded;
The colt did not see fit to quit the cover;
And though with shouts and threats the rocks resounded,
Don Pancho waited vainly, like lorn lover
Whose mistress wills not yet her person to discover.

'Dismount,' he said, 'and penetrate the thicket.
He shall not so escape us with his cunning.
Were he as wary as a timid cricket
We'll have him out to take his morning's sunning.'
The men leaped to the ground, and soon were running
Among the dwarfish trees, that caught their clothes,
And clung like creditors with constant dunning,
And made them quite as angry, I suppose;
Gregorio got a scratch straight down across his nose.

The thicket flanked the banks of a dry hollow,
The outlet of a steeper banked ravine.
And through the midst of this a trail did follow,
A vague and tortuous path the shrubs between;
Three paces off, it never would be seen;
Young Maverick, however, somehow found it;
And, sheltered by its kindly offered screen,
Determined quickly he would deeper sound it,
And note for future use how the land lay around it.

Now this same path two mountain lions made
In going to and from their savage den.
And thus it led up through the thorny glade
Until the narrowing rocks closed in again,
Young Maverick seemed shut up as in a pen,
When, lo! A tiny gateway he espied,
Up through the boulders to a higher glen,
The which was bounded in on either side
By hills so proud and high the clouds did on them ride.

He had no choice but to pursue his journey
Along the path the winter freshets cleared.
And being young, and having much to learn, he
Took little thought that what he most had feared,
Namely, an ambush, by the high rocks reared,
Was set for him, without chance of escape,
And, trotting up the canyon, quickly neared
A high wall, square in front like rocky cape,
Thrust in the canyon's jaws while lying thus agape.

And still the captive thought of little harm
To reach him here in this still solitude.
The shouts below, and signals of alarm
Could not into these channels well intrude,
Mid-earth, itself, cannot be more imbued
With silence than these sunken canyons deep:
No breeze to rustle in the grasses, strewed
On loamy shelf, or cliffs where ivies creep,
And sun and sky shine down in dozing, dreamless sleep.

A shallow basin hollowed by the falling
Of countless years of winters' waterfalls,
Still brimmed with level liquid, as recalling
The contents of the sky's high crucibles.
But, whether from reflection of grim walls,
Or whether from some property inherent,
It was not white, like the wild light that palls,
But green as onyx stone, and yet, transparent,
Transparent, yet opaque, a paradox apparent.

Young Maverick stooped to drink. His timid shadow
Came up to meet him from the under earth.
Up through the depths of green, translucent meadow
Like genii, sudden given transient birth,
Dark shining, luminous in mystic mirth,
In spite of sphinx-like mourning of the pool,
Deep jewel of the mighty mountain's worth,
A bauble yet untouched by sage or fool,
Still molten in its cup, which ages yet must cool.

Could that fair image which but now it held
Be crystalized within its bounding measure,
Then would the minstrelled miniatures of eld
Be far surpassed by this bewildering treasure:
To see it once were everlasting pleasure;
But look! It shivers back from mortal gaze!
The pool holds naught but the high zenith's leisure!
Young Maverick stands in listening, rapt amaze!
Reflected on his breast, the rippling sunlight plays.

For his keen ear had caught the distant clicking
Of footsteps on the loosely rolling stones.
Faint as a watch in muffled pocket ticking,
But clear to him as clamorous brazen tones
That shake the clattering belfry's jointed bones.
Nearer they came; and sounds of labored breathing,
With long drawn sighs, and sometimes feeble groans,
Spent winds of passion from the body seething,
Like gasps of callow youths when their first love is teething.

In short, it was the fat Gregorio
Who labored up the stony narrow dell.
Fit matter for an oratorio,
Hark to the notes, where bursting organs swell!
The climax came when poor Gregorio fell,
I grieve to say he barked his padded shins,
But persevering, as he hopes to tell
The story, later on, of how he wins;
And now, indeed, for both, excitement soon begins.

For when the colt espied the bobbing hat
Above the boulders, quick he gave one leap
Against the hill-side, little doubting that
He'd find some shelter in the ridges steep,
As did he; for a cavernous crevice deep
Yawned from the depths of earth between two boulders,
But with firm floor, that very well could keep
Him hidden from the gaze of all beholders,
And high enough in roof to shelter head and shoulders.

Had he not been hard pressed, he had been wary
Of choosing such a refuge as this cave.
For, from his childhood, he was ever chary
Of danks, that humans treasure like the grave;
But now there was no choice if he would save
His own sweet freedom, growing now still sweeter,
So much does Nature for excitement crave
That sport grows rarer as the course is fleeter;
E'en poetry will pall, couched in a facile metre.

Now this same cavern was the one, identical,
Selected for the mountain lion's lair.
And, here assembled, with the cubs, conventicle,
The dam was harbored from the outer air;
They do not like the open when they pair
And go in for a family of cubs.
No doubt the measles or pneumonia scare
Have kept them in confinement, like blind grubs:
Or else the darkness shows less strongly need of tubs.

But, with the door-way closed by the hind quarters
Of our retreating hero, both the light
And air were shut off from these sons and daughters
And fond mamma, caught dozing, took such fright,
She knew not whether it were day or night;
The smell of horse-flesh made things more confusing,
While crunch of stones and heavy breathing quite
Upset her wits; and what would seem amusing,
Her husband, half in dreams, she still went on abusing.

For she had been sore vexed with him of late
For not providing her with better dinner.
'Tis so with many a husband reprobate,
In this the lion's not the only sinner.
He took great pains, when she was young, to win her,
But now, he'd lie out snoozing in the sun
While she was daily growing gaunter, thinner,
And he too fat to comfortably run,
Taking his ease, in fact, and having all the fun.

But now, on hearing all this noise and puffing,
She thought her lord had possibly reformed.
The savory horse-flesh in her nostrils snuffing
Helped the illusion, and her kind heart warmed;
She quite forgot how she had raged and stormed,
Put on a smile of wifely, sweet devotion,
Curled in her claws till feet were quite deformed,
And glided forward with voluptuous motion;
Of shrewish snap and snarl she'd not the slightest notion.

And then, to run against Young Maverick's heels!
For both, it was an awkward kind of meeting:
He, speaking first with vicious kicks and squeals,
She, too surprised to think of now retreating,
Being still warm for her dear husband's greeting
Until her head encountering his hoof,
She saw the stars of Heaven all were fleeting,
And gave a yell to raise the very roof;
Though it being made of rock, I fancy was yell proof.

Did she retreat? Not she; she was a lion;
The lion is, you know, the king of beasts.
And think you, then, the queen is one to shy on
A little proposition of the priests,
Of shooting stars and stormy lowering Easts?
She did not cease her caterwauling though,
That's feline custom both for frays, and feasts;
But like a bullet shot from gun did go
Out of that loaded cave and hit Gregorio.

Gregorio was thinking of his love,
His last one, very sweet, her name Pepita;
Was hoping he would not so fickle prove
As with Maria, or the coy Lucita,
A girl is all the world until you meet a
Still prettier one; there are so very many.
And, after all, the stately staid Juanita
Is but the Spanish of our English Jenny,
As grateful for a kiss, as eager for a penny.

So occupied was he with his fond dreams
He had not looked much for the wanderer's tracks.
Though mid the boulders washed by mountain streams
Was little soil or sand left in the cracks
To take the print of hoofs. But, where soil lacks,
There still are many signs for mountaineer:
A fresh turned pebble, or a crushed weed smacks
Of passing hoof, and tells a story clear:
Gregorio hardly looked for such as these, I fear.

Love is a jealous mistress though she need not
Be much concerned, we always pay our dues.
The fruits of life are proffered, and we heed not,
Intent on teasing rhymes from time worn muse;
In later life we modify our views,
Enjoy a pipe and glass and eat our rations,
Regretful oftimes that we did not choose
To early enter on the wealth of nations,
Instead of courting Love, and all of her vexations.

But as things are, they are; and ever will be;
Gregorio, no different from the rest,
Had never heard of Swinburne, nor read Trilby,
And still he felt the same throes in his breast.
His shirt-front heaved; he did not wear a vest;
His lips pursed up with memories of kissing;
Forgotten was his quarry and his quest,
No thought of all the signals he was missing,
So fervid in his heart his young love now was hissing.

He marked the barricade, and saw the pool,
And feeling somewhat sad, and very tired,
He stooped his fevered lips and throat to cool,
His hand extended toward the wet desired,
When, lo! uprose that face so much admired
By all the girls whose hearts its smile had broken,
He scarcely wondered, for his own zeal fired
When he beheld the glowing, greening token,
Of colors of this pool I have already spoken.

And thus he paused, poised like the young Narcissus,
Presenting, I'm afraid, a broader figure;
His rear view is the one that must not miss us,
Where, with our cavern's gun, we've pulled the trigger;
The constant wear of saddle made it bigger
Than would appear in that lean, love-lorn youth,
Uprising in well rounded, manly vigor,
A perfect target for our bolt, in sooth,
Erected on two legs as in a shooting booth.

The trigger pressed, the bullet sped like lightning,
Accompanied by caterwauling thunder,
And hit the bull's eye square, just where the tightening
Of gathered duck cleft the youth's legs asunder.
That he went down is very little wonder
Considering the size of gun and bullet;
Both man and beast went down, and also under,
The pool receiving them like greedy pullet
That swallows all that falls into her eager gullet.

'Twas but to cast them quickly up again,
For neither, doubtless, proved quite appetizing;
Taste unfamiliar both with beasts and men
Must surely find this mouthfull quite surprising;
Gregorio'd scarce known water since baptizing,
And mountain lion is no modern Briton
Who scalds and soaks himself from hour of rising
Till afternoon, for fear he'll leave some grit on,
Rubbing himself quite raw with brush or rasping mitten.

'Tis said, whene'er you meet an Englishman,
You'll recognize in him his worthy nation,
I speak now of the English gentleman,
They differ so according to their station,
You'll recognize him by his explanation
That either he is just about to take,
Or has been taking, such illumination,
A bath. He speaks the word for Virtue's sake,
With pious, soulless voice, no quaver, and no shake.

For, being very shy, and very Puritan,
He's half afraid the word suggests a picture,
Retiring modesty cannot endure it on
Such tenter-hooks without spasmodic stricture.
He would not for the world impose as fixture
The image of himself without his clothes,
Which will insist in the confusing mixture,
Just as the perfume lingers in the rose,
Invention of the artful Devil, I suppose;

And so he speaks the word with studied graveness,
Full conscious that he's treading dangerous ground;
Half startled at his native island braveness,
Half pleased to see his hearer still looks round.
He does not realize the image found
Is scarcely tempting to voluptuary,
That parboiled carcasses like his abound,
And bog soaked leather is a sight more cheery,
Having some color still and not so scraggly hairy.

Gregorio rose to find himself in bathing
With mountain lion for a playfellow.
Her drabby tail his stifled throat was swathing
'Twas that which made him gasp and splutter so.
He seized it with both hands, the straw, you know,
Extended always to the fabled sailor,
And thus the giant cat did safely tow
Her prize to shore, as tugboat tows a whaler,
'Twixt devil and deep sea he grew each instant paler.

And when his feet were on the solid land,
He quickly cast off hitch of saving cable,
And bounding over boulders, brush and sand
Sped down the canyon quick as he was able;
Not stopping, in the language of the fable,
To pay his little thanks, and make his speech;
Those stories doubtless antedate old Bable
When growl and howl and grunt and hiss and screech
All had a meaning clearly understood by each.

The tale he told, ah, let us draw a curtain
On what he told his comrades of that bout!
We, who know all, may hold it very certain
He was the hero, which way it came out.
Would we not benefit ourselves with doubt?
Gregorio clearly never knew what hit him;
And 'twould not do to have Pepita flout
His passion, and irrevocably quit him
Simply for want of words so suitably to fit him.

And yet that bath had someway chilled his ardor;
Cold water is an antidote for love;
And while his sympathy for board and larder
Were rather sharpened by the lion's shove,
From that time on he handled with a glove
All little matters so called of the heart;
He said, of course, he now had grown above
Such boyish folly, taking in good part
The gibes and jests of all, munching a guava tart.

In two months he was married to a lady,
A good cook, too, on that all were agreed.
Though as for years, she surely knew the shady,
Safe side of thirty, when she took, to feed,
Our youth of twenty one, scarce that, indeed,
But he averred his youthful days were over,
And this proved true; let all the lesson heed:
The gayest lover, be he prince or drover,
Will settle down, in time, to cabbage, and to clover.

Or could it be the green pool was enchanted,
The liquid jewel of the Aztec glen;
That images from it obliquely slanted
Would glow with love and life, be born again;
But once within its wave, the fire of men
Would burn to ashes, every impulse dead,
As flashes of a diamond vanish when
We break into the substance, gray like lead,
From which all joy and life of love and youth have fled?

The mountain lion, also, seemed subdued,
When, drippingly, she came out on the shore;
But her condition might be well construed
As coming from the kick dealt just before.
At all events, her terrifying roar
Was not renewed. She crept away, quite humble,
Scarce realizing that, within her door,
She'd left a morsel for her cubs to mumble,
And snarl and quarrel with, causing her lord to grumble.

Such would have been, at least, her supposition
Had she wits left with which she could suppose;
At present, all she knew of her condition
Was a dazed numbness just above her nose;
The water, coursing down between her toes,
Gave her a vague reminder she'd been wet;
Just as a man, intoxicated, shows
Some feeble signs of consciousness; and yet
Remembers not the cause, nor figure of his bet.

And so it was Young Maverick walked away
As calm and as secure as if he'd been
In his own pasture at the break of day;
And if, at first, the caterwauling din
Had seemed to set his senses all a-spin,
It was so sudden ended, you might say,
The shock had hardly time to well begin
Before there was no cause for it to stay,
A passing impulse merely for his coltish play.

He sauntered leisurely adown the grass
That carpeted a winding terrace shelf,
Screened from the path below by bulwark mass
Of rock, like barbican of mountain elf;
Sometimes a cavern back for treasured pelf,
Sometimes a winding path to road below,
This fitting fortress built by Nature's self,
Proved a retreat to safely him bestow,
While through the canyon's depth fled scared Gregorio.

Full leisurely he drank the sparkling air
And waited 'neath the vaulted arch of skies,
Too ignorant to fear the lion's lair
Content to watch the yellow butterflies
That fluttered up around him in surprise,
Pure flakes of gold dropped downward from the sun,
Lured by the fire that flickered in his eyes,
Repelled again in laughing languorous fun,
Like cowslip petals shed where the wild brook doth run.

The quiet of the canyon was sustained;
Gregorio's passage left no troubled wake;
The silence closed about, and naught remained
Of echoes, which like gasping bubbles break
In the wide ether-swirl of troubled lake;
No sound, no glint of light in wave-like motion
Came filtering down from where the banners shake,
High on the surface of the sun-lit ocean,
Flecks of white cloud-foam tossed up in the wind's commo-
tion.

In truth, the search was ended for that morning.
Don Pancho had consulted with Joaquin
And learned too late to take his hinted warning,
And wait till time more favorable were seen;
An interval of quiet and serene
Would fill with confidence the timid colt;
And, sometime, crowded close the herd between,
They'd have him fast without a chance to bolt,
Once in the rope, well, let him meditate revolt.

How often it has happened in our lives
To scorn, in heat of passion, good advice,
And afterward, when calmer thought arrives,
We take the thread refused and try to splice
It on to our own line, thus failing twice:
The first time proving false to our decision,
The second time by being over nice,
And keeping several ends within our vision
We fail to get the one with consequent misprision.

They rode back slowly; all were disappointed,
Miguel and Carlos feeling it the least;
No matter how the times may be disjointed,
Two friends at table constitute a feast.
True comradeship is still the leavening yeast
That lifts the cake we call society;
Some think it's love when sanctioned by the priest;
And novels, all with due propriety,
Close in announcing this without variety.

The trouble with our usual marriage leaven,
(Why not a cook-book and a recipe?)
We think, too soon, to taste conjugal heaven,
And open up the oven door to see
How perfectly ingredients agree,
Whereat, cold Knowledge, in the oven's glow,
Chills all the germs in immaturity,
We wonder, question, meddle, haggle so,
That love has quite escaped, and our poor cake is dough.

No matter: every phase of man's affection
Has its own sweets, and constitutes in life
The part that needs the least of our correction,
Whether it be with comrade or with wife,
Whether it end in concord or in strife,
It still is what exalts his slavish nature,
Frees him from self, the bonds fall with the knife,
He rises up, a hero in his stature,
A radiance on his face that softens every feature.

Even Don Pancho, with his darkling lad,
Felt the warm comfort of a human being
Who loved him quite apart from good or bad,
For love's sake merely, with that inward seeing
That bad is good, that love and hate agreeing
Unite to make the human ego whole,
And from the chemic heat the spirit freeing,
Shakes out its plumes, becomes a living soul,
To sing the praise of love as long as worlds shall roll,

'Sing for me Marselino' he said kindly,
'Sing me the song of Julia, whose dark eyes
Shone with such brilliance, all who saw them blindly
Groped in the darkness of the noonday skies.'
Light as a bird the boy's thin voice did rise,
The other riders, closing in, around,
Joined their falsetto, wailing harmonies,
As on they moved, o'er the uneven ground,
Shadow of cloud and passion emanating sound.

Child of the mountain desert, take my heart,
And hold it, as you once did, in your hands,
While from my ears the clamor of the mart
Dies in the distance of the driving sands.
Bind me again with subtle singing bands,
And let me feel the passion and the calm,
The death of aged Egypt's storied lands,
The life of lotus and uprising palm,
Blended anew with sweets of Aztec's fragrant balm,

Let the soft desert breath across me flow,
Tempering your subtle face with love so tender,
Responding currents in my being flow
In me, receiver, and from you, the sender,
So like to like, attracting, will engender
In my worn love the everlasting sweep
Of cosmic love, that still to life doth render
Immortal song into her sacred keep,
And waft me, even now, to easeful dreamful sleep.

CANTO III

The evening sky was flushing cliff and boulder
Before Young Maverick left his high retreat;
While with the warming light, the air grew colder,
As though the sun, withdrawing now his heat,
Cast it aside in subtler essence sweet;
A few faint shrills of insects piping thin,
Gave orchestration to his sounding feet,
As down the rocky steep with clattering din
He leaped into the path his wanderings to begin.

The clouds began to blaze in golden glory
As down the winding path his way he wended,
The bastioned crags, in full light worn and hoary,
Took on a flush as though with roses blended;
From out the sky celestial dewes descended,
Which warm dry desert winds came up to greet,
Tired of playing with the day now ended,
Uprising softly, rosy lips to meet,
Lulled with light lullabies and drowsy memories sweet.

The freshet's pathway brought him to the wicket
Flanked by two boulders of pink porphyry,
Which gave to the ravine fringed by the thicket
Of thorn of mesquite and wild locust tree;
He peered into the shaded paths to see
Whether there lurked of men in ambush there,
But all was quiet and from danger free,
No hint of hidden bailiff or of snare,
Only the hush of shades gathered for evening prayer.

Young Maverick gave them pause until well over,
And stars were gathering in the purpling sky;
Then silently, with tread like stealthy lover,
He sought the covert's border, there to try
Whether alarm might greet his watchful eye;
But all seemed open on the grassy slope,
No lingering horsemen left behind, to spy
On his return, no need of dread to cope
With sentries watchful beat or whistling coiling rope.

Free on the lap of hill-side now he stands,
A gleam of light upon the darkened grass;
Below him slope the richer pasture lands,
Above, and backward, yawns the stony pass
That blends into the sheltering mountain's mass.
Within that gate his comrades wait him still,
Their play soon ended, lacking him, alas!
There is no other one his place to fill,
No one to lead them now with uncurbed, fearless will.

He feels their yearning for him, and, still stronger
He feels the call of his dear upland heath;
Though shelter it can furnish him no longer
From the dark men who hold the lands beneath.
A sword finds comfort in its harboring sheath,
But swords must flash into the battle's din,
There is no safety scabbards can bequeath,
Nor were it worthy to sit snugly in
A place of refuge, safe, when battles wild begin.

Still, on him sits his youth; and all his longing
Is for his playmates, and the motherhood
Of circling hills, from birth to him belonging,
His only ken of gentleness and good;
By very few is this dear call withstood,
And they are more like disembodied spirits
That wander in a wild and trackless wood,
A wilderness a hermit disinherits,
Because it lacks the life that even recluse merits.

As some worn heretic whose bitter years
Have left him without helpful creed or friend,
Still haunted by the future's growing fears,
Aghast in contemplation of the end,
To what black chasms may his soul descend,
Hears the sweet church bells of his native lea;
And sees the happy flocks that thither wend,
So stands through life that soul that dares be free,
And looks for happiness to heartless liberty.

Long stood our hero in the star flaked darkness,
Bound by the longing for his fellow kind;
The sunken moon was silvering the starkness
Of snowy mountain peaks that rose behind
The valley where his heart strings were entwined;
Those snowy peaks, alas, how cold their gleams!
What comfort that their frigid glaciers find
The waters fair that sweeten all our streams,
And wealth of grasses green out of their chastened dreams?

Not till the sunken weazened moon had risen
From out the sullen darkness of the East,
Cleaving the cloud-bars of her iron prison
With sickening smile of death's head at the feast,
Not till the mesas caught the bloom at least,
Though still the canyons lurked in heavy black,
While iron clouds were with faint silver fleeced
Did sad Young Maverick turn reluctant back
Upon his childhood's home, taking the downward track.

He journeyed toward the moon whose white beams glancing
From off his pale gold gleaming back and sides
Were like the elf lights in his large eyes dancing.
What unseen spirit is it that bestrides
That gleaming back and towards his fancy rides?
We know not; but some mystic force directs him,
Perhaps the moon-beams are his only guides;
No matter: 'tis the Sun that still protects him,
Though hidden underneath, his shield on high reflects him.

Young Maverick quickens now his moody saunter,
And takes the coming plains with gathering speed
Until his gait acquires a gentle canter,
Though fickle hollows still must give him heed;
He has not day-light yet his chart to read,
There still is caution in his mode of travel,
Though beaten path he does not seek or need;
For soon the broken ridges all unravel,
And on in full career he skims the fleeting gravel.

The plains are flowing from him like a river:
Back, back they slide beneath his oaring feet;
The long dusk flags of dawn about him shiver,
Winds of the coming light his speed to greet.
Soon will the banners of Apollo meet
The messenger that gilds the desert waves,
Soon will the rose-leaves of the morning sweet
Be strewn on all the fleeting water laves,
And shadows gasp their breath in rosy flower-like graves.

If night with all her galaxy of splendor
Is wonderful, what word describes the dawn,
When the first sallow light becomes more tender,
And the wild sickening fear of death is gone?
Into the West the shroud of night withdrawn
Flutters like baleful flag, then disappears;
And chasms of the sleeping canyons yawn,
And open up their deeps of dizzying fears,
As they have done the same thro countless depths of years.

When the white-tinging zone across the vault
Of the wide Eastern sky begins to glow,
And the stars tremble with the light's assault,
And faint from sight like melting flakes of snow,
When the bold current of the onward flow
Bursts all the barriers of night asunder
That crashing down chaotic tangents go
Reverberating through the skies like thunder,
Then must we sit amazed in awesome speechless wonder.

Not so our arrow from the pale Moon's quiver
Though she forgotten is amid the skies,
And like poor palpitating moth doth shiver
Against the light that blazes in her eyes,
And piteously in ecstasy she dies,
Not so the fleeting arrow shares her fate,
As straight against the shield of day he flies,
Like lonely lover rushing to his mate,
Not casting look behind nor pausing at the gate.

Young Maverick greets the swinging orb of day,
When first he clears the dull horizon's brim,
With shrilling gladness of a single neigh,
And speeds ahead as if straight under him,
Perhaps his guiding spirit thinks the rim
Is but the hoop of fire of circus clowns,
And quick makes ready for the leap, to skim
The crackling circle with her spangled gowns,
And turn to wild applause the thousand anxious frowns.

No matter: I, at least, am out of breath,
Not quite accustomed to this rapid motion,
And mindful what the ancient proverb saith,
To stop and take a drink, I have a notion,
Don't shudder I assure you that the lotion
Is purest water from a cup of tin;
And that reminds me that this wild commotion,
Has made our hero thirsty, too, as sin,
So with your leave well stop and put a river in.

A river in the desert is a dimple
That quivers in a pale nun's sallow cheek;
Bound round with lifeless cloth and stiff starched wimple;
Not daring to a game of hide-and-seek,
With shifting smiles on that poor face so meek,
But still remains half human and half holy,
I would not think in sacrilege to speak,
And give but passing glance to mountain moly
Touched with the rose and sadness of sweet melancholy.

A fringe of willows and green bushes bordered
This swiftly gliding mirror of the sky,
Tangled with grasses like blown hair disordered
By every wanton wind that passes by;
High on the banks the stones lay parched and dry,
But where the swirling, eddying waters flowed
The grateful soil gave many a happy sigh,
And green of gratitude most courteous showed,
Giving both birds and fish dim places of abode,

The sheeted current ever hurried onward
Trailing its molten ribbon through the drear
Dead wastes of rock and sand let gently downward
From where the mountains shimmered in the clear
Dry heat from off the desert scorched and sere.
It seemed as if the waters, conscience stricken
For having fled their forests, sick with fear
Felt their thin floods to curdle and to thicken,
And strove as in a dream their lagging gait to quicken.

Below would come a plain where they could linger
And idle with the ways and toys of men,
Turning the logy mill with languid finger
Refreshing through canals the garden pen,
Or filling rock-bound basins now and then,
Where dark-haired singing women beat their boards
Cleansing the snowy linen, laughing when
They catch the rippling liquid in their gourds,
And watch it shift and gleam like coins the miser hoards.

Gay-kerchiefed, sad-eyed women of the South,
What is the mystery the magic spell
That keeps your eyes in sadness, while the mouth
Gleams with white laughter that the gay lips tell?
Is it the haunting of the mission bell,
The memory of the convent still that rules?
Three generations back those stern walls fell.
The priests are keeping now but paltry schools,
And husbands lightly smile and call you dupes and fools.

Or is it, not from teaching, but from life
You learn the tragedy that haunts your eyes?
Is it the lot of mother and of wife
To draw the seven sorrows from the skies
And deify them, then, in Paradise,
While still their laughter rules the world below?
And men look on in wonder and surprise,
Nor cease to marvel at the shallow flow
Of thoughtless, cruel words that lightly come and go.

Man's sadness is than woman's wider, deeper,
But by his actions, not his eyes revealed;
It has within an envious, watchful keeper,
From every feature is the gem concealed;
The deed alone a generous arm can wield,
When, swift in flash of light or frenzied battle,
Benignant pity knows his sheltering shield,
No matter how the curses rain and rattle,
And men go down like grain trampled by herded cattle.

But women show their sadness, and men love them
Because they show it: which they dare not do.
And, if through self-reserve, they stand above them,
'Tis but to pay their highest tribute to
The semblance of that passion deep and true
They hide within themselves, like boys, ashamed
E'en to confess it as dear friendship's due,
Lest 'twill escape on being boldly named,
And they, for hypocrites, be all too lightly blamed.

But back again to where Young Maverick touches
The sliding surface with his timid lips;
His fore legs rigid as two bracing crutches
While up his supple throat refreshment slips;
A swaying willow in the water dips,
On which a slender water snake, suspended,
Darts feathery tongue in silent taunting quips,
Content to wait until the action's ended,
Full wise in that old saw, 'Least said is soonest mended.'

And when the colt, with backward rearing leap,
Stands firm established on the level bank,
The snake uncoils, and glides into the deep
Of swirling eddy, where the lips late drank,
Earth's emblem of the heavenly lightning's rank,
He writhes into the yielding water's flood
With many a graceful turn and willful prank,
Kissing the bubbles into fruitful bud,
That rise like flowers of air out of the stagnant mud.

For lightning, so the Indians tell the story,
Is the life-giver, fructifying all
It touches, in its downward diving glory,
Even the dead rock answers its clear call,
And softens into soil, live, magical;
But if the lightning strikes a living thing,
The joy is so intense, it bursts its thrall,
And mounting upward on a heavenly wing,
Loud through the firmament doth wildly sweetly sing.

Love is the lightning in our modern faith;
It makes the senseless clod to thrill with pleasure,
Creates in it a sensing yearning wraith,
That knows no limit which its soul can measure;
From out its heart it takes the precious treasure,
And gives it freely to the world around;
But should, once more, Love strike from out the azure
The poor wraith falls a-writhing on the ground,
Dead, with her joy, perhaps; she shows no sign of wound.

Can it be, likewise, that two loves, united,
Fly to the heavens in wild carolling?
That what we see is but the body, blighted,
And writhing from the serpent's deadly sting?
A blighted love were sure a doubtful thing,
Although we see their corpses thick around us,
Why not believe, here, too, the soul takes wing,
Nor let the shattered ruins quite confound us,
But hearken to the spheres that sing in swinging round us?

Young Maverick knew not love as humans know it,
At least not yet, and if he ever could
He'd have the common sense to frankly show it,
And get it purged from out his healthful blood
By nature's process, as all creatures should,
Except ourselves, who, blessed with a religion,
Or tribal custom, not to be withstood,
Must bill and coo for years like prisoned pigeon,
Hugging our sterile fetich, praying to pigwidgeon.

He cantered miles along the green fringed river,
Till alien mountains, nearing, did begin
To close around like dark confining quiver
Sheathing the clashing arrowy waters in;
A rugged path crept close along the din
Of splashing echoes from the dripping rocks,
For narrowing whirlpools, leaping high would spin
Their flashing bubbles out to burst in shocks,
And gather in swift rills like Fury's storm tossed locks.

But still the path crept on, until the chasm
Grew wider and less perilous and steep,
Earth had recovered from its racking spasm
Though still the scar showed lurid, dark and deep;
But softly soon the hills lay back to sleep,
And wide the valley stretched in sunlit calms,
A second desert in the aged keep
Of mystic gold of sun's preserving balms,
And planted wide like flowers with stately rising palms.

The soil was here more golden than before,
And giant cacti held their logy stems
Like heavy candelabra, while a score
Of flame-pure flowers, arrayed like diadems,
Decked out their thorn ridged green with sparkling gems
Of topaz and of ruby, while the bees,
Droning monotonous, sad requiems,
Beaded the mantle of the even breeze,
That bore a fragrance far from wild acacia trees.

And deer-tongued lilies loomed their green white spikes
From out their clumps of bristling bayonets,
Pale virgins e'en the listless fly dislikes,
Rank with a sterile odor, which offsets
The clustered beauty of their pure rosettes,
Though round each one there hovers the immortal
White emblem of the butterfly, that gets
Not ever quite within the frigid portal,
But round the heatless flame doth lightly, gaily hurtle;

And weird euphorbias reared their antlered stalks,
Set thick with spines and tiny emerald leaves,
A thorny menace to the man who walks
Regardless of their unbound, scraggly sheaves;
On them his blood and bits of garments leaves
The one who, hastening o'er the parching sand,
Still for the green of past oasis grieves,
Still travelling with his thoughts amid that band
Of friends of childhood's days, a long forsaken land.

For do we not, all of us, in life's journey,
Come to the thorny deserts we must cross?
The youth's romance of battle-field and tourney
Will hardly hold through life's advancing loss.
There is so little gold, so much of dross,
So much of waiting, and so little action,
And hope has long since failed the facts to gloss,
And hunger so exceeds its satisfaction,
And all the universe has suffered such contraction,

We stand dazed, in a desert, staring blindly,
Oblivious of its treasures all around,
Not seeing how harsh Nature still proves kindly,
And tempers to endure the sultry ground;
We think but of our own proud, sullen wound,
And think to dash across the bitter plain;
Alas, the end is not so quickly found!
Full fortunate are we if, soon again,
We learn to see that good grows out of biting pain.

Some say the fay Morgana haunts the barrens,
But I have found her more in garden flowers;
Grim skeletons and dessicating carrions
Can hardly tempt that houri of the hours;
She rather lingers in the dewy bowers
Of dreamful youth, and dandles there her prize;
The desert knows more grim and sturdy powers,
'Tis there the scales drop off from our dim eyes
And we see Truth's stark form and seeing grow more wise.

Better like our Young Maverick to be born
From out the desert sands, of its pale gold,
Than to be nurtured in a land of corn
And blessings that its wealth makes manifold,
Corrupting self with laws of have and hold;
Better the jewels of the open sky
Than all that mines of earth have ever told,
Its hardships and its rigors once passed by,
The soul looks forth content, with calm unselfish eye.

The languorous afternoon was softly drowsing
When out from the horizon grew a vision,
Which gold of burnished heat had there been housing,
As angels dwell behind the gates Elysian,
The features took swift outline and precision,
Like fabled centaur, leaping, on it came,
As if great Love, desiring the collision,
Had brought two worshippers to call her name,
And kindle there between her pale undying flame.

It was a radiant boy of some twelve summers,
Summers that winter had not touched with care,
And bearing him, for there were two new comers,
A dark brown pony, a young Mexic mare,
Of bit and bridle, saddle, blanket, bare
As was the boy of garments, that bestrode her,
So lightly sat he on her withers there,
You would not think on looking that he rode her,
There was no sign of weight or heaviness to load her.

To guide her he would merely wave his hand,
Or press his heel against her yielding flank,
And swift responding to the faint command,
She started, stopped, or into canter sank,
So willingly she recognized her rank,
It was like body to the ruling brain,
Or untouched tablet lying waiting, blank,
To take on words of pleasure, hope, or pain,
Whate'er the writer thinks, and wishes to remain.

And coming as they did quite naked to him,
Young Maverick felt no shock or touch of fear;
Here were no captor's wiles to slyly woo him
With snare but half concealed and loathsome gear
Of cloth and hemp and leather, crisp and sere;
This was a living being, clean confessed:
And in its countenance shone freedom clear,
And love and motion, that may half be guessed
But are not shown entire by people who go dressed.

The brown mare whinnied out a friendly greeting,
Young Maverick answered with a joyful call,
The boy, as well, enraptured with the meeting,
Held up his hand as sign of peace for all;
Young shepherd David, standing before Saul,
Could not have been more fair to look upon
Than this thin stripling by his horse made tall,
An antique statue which with genius shone
Like those engraved upon the far famed Parthenon.

His polished body was a golden bronze,
A lighter color than the dark brown mare;
The color you will see beneath the fronds
Of seeding fern, you'll find it anywhere;
The radiance of his crisping copprous hair
Held contrast with the darker mane and tail
That roistered from his pony in the air
Creating for itself a gallant gale,
Like ship in changeful breeze that flaps a wilful sail.

With shining eyes and proud necks gently rounded,
The horses met in stately grave advance;
To see them one would think the music sounded,
And call was issued for the coming dance;
In formal salutation with mild glance
They do not stop till they have light touched noses,
Curvetting then, with eyes still turned askance,
They snort and nicker which we must suppose is
Horse-language compliments and all those pretty proses.

In Mexico men lightly touch the shoulder
With right hand, while the left, around the waist,
Gives firmer pressure; then, as growing bolder,
Their right hands clasp, each in the other placed;
Their eyes are lifted and the stranger faced.
It seems to me a pretty salutation
When with their leisure and politeness graced;
I ne'er have seen in any other nation
A greeting more in form for every rank and station.

The elders or superiors in rank
Initiate the manner of the greeting.
'Twixt friends the clasp is warm, the look is frank,
I'd walk a mile to see such manly meeting.
Caresses no less real because they're fleeting,
A laugh that hints a tear, but does not show it,
A careless backward step, as if, retreating,
Their love had been expressed, let who would know it
Or guess at tenderness hidden away below it.

The love that holds between two stalwart friends,
Love free from sex or sex's fierce desire,
That gathers all life's broken ravelled ends
And weaves them in a bond no strain can tire,
Anneals them in a chemic mystic fire,
That love is such a beauteous breathless spirit,
The poet catches swift his eager lyre
And tries a chant of such celestial merit
The strings snap wild in twain, too mortal they to bear it.

A humbler task is ours, as soft the shadows
Purple and deepen the gold desert's glow;
The sun retiring from his labored meadows
Into a farther field doth softly go;
Reluctantly, with lingering glances slow,
He bows his head beneath horizon's rim,
As if half doubting that the morning so
Would meet his greeting and smile back on him,
Untouched by dews of night and mourning darkness dim.

Perhaps another reason for his lingering
Was he was loth to part from these three creatures
That his reluctant rosy rays were fingering,
Kissing the laughter on their limbs and features;
For youthful play, the surest of all teachers,
Had made young Maverick with the two acquainted,
And what he had refused to all beseechers
He gave the boy with simple trust, untainted
By any vague suspicions either real or feinted..

They played at running on the open level,
And round and round they went in fiery race;
The boy's brown body, bent in steadying bevel,
Did not once shift from out the balanced place,
Still leaning inward in the narrowing space,
His arms outstretched to urge the pleasure faster,
The wild joy leaping in his beauteous face,
Young Mercury could hardly be his master,
Unconscious there could hap of danger or disaster.

When the brown pony breathless stopped to rest,
The boy leaped off with merry laughing bound,
And on Young Maverick's tingling withers pressed
His pretty face and put his arms around
The quivering neck, but stayed upon the ground;
He did not spring into that virgin saddle;
Not yet, though love and longing were profound;
His eager legs could scarce forbear the straddle,
But instinct still refrained his boyish brain to addle.

They started then a game of hide-and-seek;
The boy would slip away behind some shelter
With many a cautious run and wary sneak,
Or like a lizard in the sand would welter,
You'd think a salamander there would swelter,
Not he, a child born of the wind and sun;
The pony, missing him, ran helter-skelter,
Keen in the search and relishing the fun,
Searching the shaded haunts nor missing any one.

And when, at length, with scenting snort and snuffle,
He spied the boy half buried in the sand,
Like rooting swine intent on luscious truffle,
His lips found out a brown spasmodic hand.
The bursting boy could not such joy withstand,
But with wild shout leaped on the waiting shoulders,
Gave the slight signal of his will's command,
Away they sped o'er bushes and o'er boulders,
A joy as well to those who chanced to be beholders.

Young Maverick in this game initiated,
Chanced once to find the hiding culprit first;
And with glad pleasure and sweet joy elated,
Stood with wild heart that seemed about to burst,
And boy, quite frenzied now, feared not the worst,
But leaped upon the lithe and panting body;
He'd done it though he knew it were accursed,
The sport had made him such a dizenod noddie,
Intoxicated so with this unheard-of toddie.

And when young Maverick felt the weight caressing
His supple back, his joy shot up like fire;
And when the slender legs his sides were pressing,
He, looking backward, saw the arms wreathed higher,
Winged was he now with his own heart's desire;
Like the pent geyser from the earth's deep dungeon
That to the heaven's zenith doth aspire,
The flying clouds to throttle and to plunge on,
Gushed from volcanic pulse of subterranean engine.

So rose he like a fountain winged with passion,
Poised on his backward hoofs, erect and free;
The boy, familiar with this equine fashion,
Clung firm with clasping thigh and steady knee,
His arms were still out flying buoyantly,
Though ready if he felt his thighs should slip
To circle vine-like round that golden tree,
The moss of which brushed soft against his lip
As if to freshen him with its elixir sip.

The arm was ready, but the clutch not needed,
For down again the trembling fountain came;
Changed to a river now that swiftly speeded
Adown the desert like the lightning's flame;
The boy was laughing at the merry game;
The poor brown pony, now left far behind,
Called to them wistfully with tender name,
Well thinking they were thoughtless and unkind
To leave her stranded so, with heavy burdened mind.

But they returned before she thought to follow,
The boy down bending now like speeding arrow,
The pony wondering at this gold white swallow
That left her twittering like a ruffled sparrow;
Round, and again, the circle growing narrow,
Till they made pause before her wondering gaze,
Astonished, scarcely knowing joy from sorrow,
So wound and twisted was she in this maze,
She thought she smelled the smoke and saw the bushes blaze.

But when the boy, with pity for her yearning,
Slipped on her back from off Young Maverick's neck,
She felt her simple joy again returning,
Her grief already dwindled to a speck;
And when she saw the knowing nod and beck
Of her companion play-mate, swift she wheeled,
And all together o'er the desert's deck
They played a merry tune, so lightly heeled,
If there was jealousy it was full well concealed.

This for effect: but once the village threaded,
And they are down among the well hedged fields,
Bernardo shows himself no feather-headed
Young fop who to the smiles of Fortune yields:
He doffs his drawers and shirt; though hat still wields
Its lordly dignity of high estate;
'Tis safest on his head; besides, it shields
His eyes from the fierce sun: for now, 'tis late,
So long they lingered there at preparation's gate.

The fields are now deserted by the workers,
And our two heroes looking well around
To make sure of no witnesses or lurkers,
Enter the gate to their paternal ground,
And quickly, without any talk or sound,
Begin to gather vegetables together,
Piling them up into a luscious mound,
First spreading out a rug of fragrant heather,
Keeping an eye well out for any change of weather.

But there was little fear of interruption,
No Mexic farmer likes the midday heat,
At least, in their day, there was no corruption
Of old time customs from the Spanish seat;
The language holds no word that sounds more sweet
Than that, 'siesta', noon-day's idleness;
To northern minds it seems not such a treat,
We being busy-bodies, nothing less,
With more sins thence derived than I could well confess.

When they had gathered a sufficient pile,
Potatoes, onions, carrots, turnips, beets,
Bernardo brought two bags, concealed the while,
Within the blankets' neatly folded sheets,
He sat on these while riding through the streets,
Indeed, he showed much caution for a lad,
And, if his conduct not quite always meets
With your approval, yet, he was not bad.
Nor need you shake your head, superior and sad.

For some unfeeling ones had joked with him
And said that now he'd have to yield his horse
Unto the rightful owner; for this trim
Would not permit of walking, which, of course,
Did seem quite likely. But without remorse,
Or even sullenness, or yet regret
Francisco was most ready to endorse
All plans his cousin's honor to abet;
He said he'd walk, of course, and did not even fret.

Then Donya Ana took from out her chest
The linen smock Francisco always wore
When dressed for Sunday in his very best,
And put it on him just outside the door
Where all could see the dignity he bore.
It was a pretty costume neat for travel,
A row of pearly buttons down before,
And nicely hemmed, that edges might not ravel,
Convenient in its length, cut just below the navel.

Bernardo, just in way of mild suggestion,
Said they might take along a bag of meal,
So that there need not be the slightest question
About their welcome. And their aunt could feel
Quite free to show them all her kinship's zeal.
His father quite agreed, expressing pleasure
His son should think of other people's weal;
A bag was filled with copious good measure,
And saddled on in front, a veritable treasure.

Now, all, good bye! The knight is gaily mounted,
Fond messages are given to their friends;
The bag of meal, the blankets have been counted,
The binding rope on which the pack depends
Is tightened up and tucked in at the ends;
Joaquin has helped and shown himself most kind:
Brown Pony down the street her slow way wends,
Francisco, taking tail, pulls back behind,
Leaving Joaquin to watch and whistle down the wind.

'Are all the women so extravagant
A poor man cannot hope to have a roof?'
His stony look on vacancy still bent,
'No, there are many who when put to proof
Can keep a family from want aloof
On what a man throws wantonly aside.
I know one such,' and here a softer woof
Showed through the stony face, a look half pride
Half reverence it was, he could not wholly hide.

'Why then not marry her?' I asked him gently,
'There surely is much happiness to gain?'
A flash of tenderness just touched him faintly,
A quiver only, as a knife of pain
Leaves on still living flesh it cleaves in twain,
Flesh that quick settles, stiffens into death,
And will not ever leap or gleam again
In answer to the joyous blood and breath,
A sight at which the heart, if tender, sickeneth.

'Twas then we saw a far acequia trailing
Its vine of green across the desert gray,
And of the symbol his keen mind availing,
My guide reached down and plucked from out the way,
(To do so, not dismounting, was but play,)
He plucked from out the path a withered stalk
Of grass that some green shower had made gay,
Then sun and wind had bleached to white of chalk,
And with that little text he organized his talk.

'It was the same seed as the rank growth yonder
That weighs upon th' acequia's fruitful breast.
Think you the parent flower held that one fonder
Than this, that now stands here so meanly dressed?
And God above gives both a like bequest,
But man has given one the water's flow,
And this stands here accursed, a cruel jest!
But the two seeds, boy, I would have you know,
They were the same, the same, and to the same would grow.'

I looked at him, who might have been his son,
That man fantastic, gray, beside me there,
I had no word to say, there was not one
That could give comfort to his black despair;
But, from that outburst, always, everywhere,
He showed toward me a father's gentleness,
An awkwardness, uncouth, that still would dare
To break through such reserves of meat and mess
That lightly touched on me, but him did closely press.

I might have been his son, to whom the blessing
The living water brings had been denied:
I might have been: who, the same germ possessing
Far from the water, withered, sickened, died:
In all his actions I that thought descried;
It was a foolish fancy, I acknowledge,
But piteously he clutched it in his pride,
And, after all, who shall not say that college
Does yield a little juice along with dusty knowledge?

But, now I have grown older, I can see,
At least, I think I see the case more clearly,
And would not with my guide so well agree;
I quite admit the truth was purchased dearly,
Though once acquired, has been increasing yearly,
I hope you will forgive the personality,
Without it I had not succeeded, nearly,
Though 'tis a method used by the rascality,
And scarce approved, at all, by people called 'the quality'.

Had I been of his blood, and desert-born,
Or, of the blood I am, were fairer stated,
At least, were I not destined to adorn
This noble art to which I now am mated,
An art I half suspect is overrated,
So few there are who read a single poem,
Though if the question is by chance debated,
All speak familiarly as if they know 'em,
Though most turn tail and run if but a book you show 'em.

But back again now to the mooted question
Had I been born far from the living waters
Beyond the pale of any vague suggestion,
In fact, I do come from the Kansas squatters,
The tribes of herdsmen, farmers, cobblers, potters,
But then, of course, we had the public school,
Oh, stern New England with your school-ma'am daughters
Have you, by law, kept me from playing fool,
Or brought it on instead, holding my heels to cool?

The public school! If once, I should get started
Discussing universal education,
I know not when this canto would be parted
From that which follows next in our notation,
Digression comes again in dissertation,
For now we find we're getting scholarly,
Should not the word be rather numeration?
I must admit it's got me up a tree,
My own fault, too, I own, but what's the odds to me?

I used to say of those dark Mexic people
I liked them better that they could not read;
That call of school-bell or the chapel steeple
Had never their poor virtues Phariseed;
They had a faith, indifferent, indeed,
Half Roman and half native, superstitious
Among the women, though the men were freed
From any charge at all; but no way vicious,
At least no more than we, if that be not pernicious.

It seems like drinking from a well's pure fountain,
To listen to their talk of life and law;
Their teachers are the desert and the mountain;
If their philosophy admits a flaw
'Tis not through lack of reverence or awe,
Nor yet of love or patient sympathy,
And if fierce passion sometimes bids them draw
A weapon, 'tis a childish thing to see;
Such rage a child endures, and soothed accordingly.

And oh, the contrast with that snug content
That typifies our shallow education!
For us, the heavenly, starry firmament
Is but a neat array and combination
Of matter and the force of gravitation;
For them, the silent mystery of the stars
Is what young Adam saw at his creation
When night first drew her silent awesome bars
Across the face of day like pallid sickening stars.

Perhaps, had I been born in their condition,
I had found all as commonplace and stale
As I do here, when cursed with inanition,
Inclined at our democracy to rail;
Perhaps, piped water running in a pail
Is just as sweet as at its native spring,
I only know my jaded senses fail,
I seek the source 'mid wild birds carolling,
And down upon the moss, myself in rapture fling.

The squat mud village half in twilight hidden
Was tinkling still with sounds of cracked-voiced bells,
Men called to supper, and of children chidden,
And shouts for maids who lingered at the wells,
Enchained by Love's eternal magic spells;
Ah, youth and twilight, here by us remembered!
Our heart still at the recollection swells,
Though now our April hopes are all Novembered,
And sullen ashes lie on hearthstones long since embered.

At least, we hope 'tis so, or hoping not,
We fear it may be, and grow sentimental.
And if it should be some companion's lot
Whose years when counted might prove detrimental,
We laugh at him with mirth not always gentle,
And say he's old enough to now know better,
Though when we come to reasons elemental,
And analyze our logic to the letter,
The final good is still to love her and to get her.

But all the time Young Maverick, watchful, cautious,
Has slackened on his former eager gait;
While our digressions have been growing nauseous
We've left him here to meet or fly his fate.
The boy decided it was best to wait;
So, slipping off the back of his brown pony,
He left her to companion her new mate,
While he, without the slightest ceremony
Of making his adieus, ran home to tell his crony.

Here let us leave our hero for the night,
But this time not alone beneath the stars;
The maid, Capella, holds the guardian right;
Nor does he sense the ruddy flames of Mars,
Nor shudder at pale Saturn's binding bars;
In other words, more practical and prosy,
Not to be hampered with particulars,
The pony leads the way to pastures cozy,
Where grass is green and sweet and clovers are in posie.

CANTO IV

Francisco, so our beauteous boy was named,
Now quite unable his new joy to smother,
Sought out Bernardo, also quite untamed,
Some two years older, not an elder brother,
But born unto a sister of his mother,
Francisco's parents had been some years dead,
And he, not finding joy in any other,
Had taken the brown pony up instead,
Reserving only time for supper and for bed.

Bernardo's father really owned the mare,
But when he saw Francisco's great affection,
He gladly gave her to his nephew's care,
Not yielding to his own son's predilection,
Who not yet old enough for greed's infection,
Gave way as well and waived his nearer claim,
Found solace in the cousinly connection,
Reserved no malice, and applied no blame,
E'en taking proper pride in the young rider's fame.

But when, that night, their frugal supper ended,
Francisco drew him to a dark retreat,
Then faced him smiling, with both arms extended,
Till clasping fingers round his neck did meet,
And on his feet he felt the lighter feet
Of his child cousin swinging wantonly,
With rigid body doughty yet discreet,
Well backward balanced firm the stiffening knee,
He knew reward had come with full unstinted fee.

It came, in childish frankness, all the story,
The meeting and the play, the homeward ride,
How the Young Maverick, in pale gold glory
Cantered with confidence his leg beside,
And how he seemed so well content to bide,
Taking the path that led down to the river,
Accepting the brown pony for his guide
As if he knew the place, and now would never
Stray off from home again, but dwell with them forever.

Bernardo listened with his arms light folded
To calm the heaving of his sturdier breast;
His well knit body was already molded
By growing manhood, which upon him pressed;
Though of its whisperings he little guessed;
He still went naked save for linen shield
Drawn twixt his legs, beneath a waist-cord pressed,
With sash-like end in front, that quite concealed
Reserve of sex, for him scarce inwardly revealed.

His mother had but late her stripling furnished
With this insignia of a man's estate.
The yellow sun still held his body burnished,
The desert winds still claimed their childhood's mate.
But on his limbs a quiet firmness sate,
Half boy, half man, that period of wonder,
When heavenly Passion, lingering at the gate,
Stands half entranced to hear the rolling thunder
That drives the tempest on to flood her victims under.

Francisco's story ended, hand in hand,
They sped along a silent winding alley
To where the open moister meadow land
Slopes down to touch the stream that threads the valley:
No call of playmates tempted them to dally;
The wet caressing darkness met their faces;
The hedged enclosures gave them count and tally,
Till out they came to wider open spaces
Bounded by bosky stream which the flat tract embraces.

Francisco gave a whistle, low and faint,
Like the soft cooing of the mountain quail;
Another, then another, till the 'plaint
Pierced the far depths of the wild pampas swale.
Such eagerness could hardly them avail;
They could not wait to catch the whinnied answer
Of the brown pony, keeping still in trail
Her beauteous partner, like a jealous dancer
Who the gay crowd avoids, shy of quadrille and lancer.

But answer came in time, a wistful nicker,
Conveying hope of tid-bit to her master;
At first she seemed disposed to stop and bicker,
Suspicioning an empty-handed pastor,
But he, anticipating this disaster,
Had plucked, along the way, some pods of locust,
Not very sweet but still a soothing plaster
To touch that spot where all affection's focused;
How often proffered sweets have females hocus-pocused.

The boys ran further down, they were so eager
To see the wondrous stranger, not the pony;
A path led winding down through bushes meager,
Old break in the acequia, somewhat stony,
The flood had left the channel dry and bony,
No matter if they bruised their boyish shins,
There must be tax on every patrimony,
And pain unminded is where sport begins,
And action has no need to feel remorse for sins.

And when, at length, they found the ghost-white stranger,
That seemed to gleam like fox-fire in the dark,
And found he had not suffered fright or danger,
And felt his flanks for sign of branded mark,
Indeed he might have stepped out from the ark
So free was he from any iron's scarring,
Bernardo felt as happy as a lark
For now, without Francisco's pleasure barring,
He had his horse again, for making or for marring.

So bread cast on the waters doth return,
So the brown pony got her compensation,
And if the locusts made her stomach burn,
Her heart, at least, was happy in elation;
In medicine, 'tis called heart-palpitation;
No matter: back the boys went, now, to bed;
And we will overlook, in our narration,
Just how they got there, and just what they said,
Their conversation, doubtless, was but stable bred.

Prompt the next morning with the rising sun,
Or promptly sometime after it had risen,
They came again to greet the wandering one
Whom the gold glancing sun-rays did bedizen
Making him gleam like dew from fore to mizzen;
And when they saw him, in amazed delight,
They stood like good Saint John, when, in his prison,
The glittering angel smote his aching sight;
They laughed, hallooed and sang with all their boyish might.

And after they had groomed their willing steeds,
Rubbing them briskly with fine wisps of grass,
And given each according to his needs,
(Good socialism, do not let it pass,)
Ability, with them, was slight, alas,
But somewhere they had found a battered measure,
A curious old Spanish bowl of brass,
And filled it up half full with golden treasure
Of meal of maize, well wet, for any horse a pleasure.

It were a pretty sight to see the snorting
Young Maverick careering round that bowl
Upheld by two lithe naked boys, exhorting
The cautious one to trust in their parole;
Brown Pony would have eaten up the whole
Were she permitted, but the watchful donors
Used her for a decoy; and in this role
She surely carried off the day with honors
Nor seemed displeased or grieved with her too partial owners.

Not till the golden bait smeared on his muzzle
Had sent its perfume through his being thrilling,
Would he consent the fearsome bowl to nuzzle,
And then there was much need of patient drilling,
The contents were half wasted by his spilling,
But all came through the trial well content,
And next time doubtless he would prove more willing.
So easily the tree, when young, is bent,
And man is well controlled by childhood's government.

When all was finished and the dish lipped clean,
Bernardo, by the way of an example,
Leaped on the pony, who moved off serene,
Unconscious that she might have reason ample
To blame both masters, who could grossly trample
On her poor feelings; but, as matters stood,
She saw no difference 'twixt piece and sample,
And did not question that both things were good,
Such disposition rare, when met, can't be withstood.

And when Young Maverick, seeing the equestrian,
Felt in himself a sense of something lacking,
And saw the same to yearn in the pedestrian,
With gentle invitation, slightly backing,
He gave himself, with muscles softly slacking,
To stiffen quick in forward leap and bound,
As, swiftly after gay Bernardo tracking,
The two skimmed over the uneven ground,
A daintier two, in truth, could scarcely well be found.

For while Bernardo was of fine bronze molded,
With grace as firm as shaped by Donatello,
Francisco from his horse was softly golded
With intoned amber-light so mild and mellow,
Old ivory from long use shows such yellow
As gleamed adown his half-translucent thighs,
Bucephalus, I think bore such a fellow,
But this steed had no need of wings to rise,
Instead he brought to earth wide Heaven's Paradise.

They skirted the mud village, leaving wide
A space of silence round its morning chatter,
They were not certain what might there betide,
And this first morning beckoned wilder matter;
Along smooth sands the horses' hoofs' pit-patter
Was talk enough in their still cautious ears,
While wide the light around them seemed to scatter,
Brushing away timidity and fears
That come from parents sage, experienced in years.

One ride, at least, before the ban judicial
Was set upon the freedom of their actions;
One ride before decisions artificial
Should settle with conclusions and exactions;
Then, danger might arise from separate factions,
And some grim court hold up in litigation
The whole proceeding; till, reduced to fractions,
The whole, perplexed in helpless botheration
Should turn to politics, and welfare of the nation.

Oh, worthy fathers of our government,
Shrewd perpetrators of our politics,
Are we so sure you were by Heaven sent?
Or were you not, perhaps, mere Devil's tricks,
His hoof-prints show so plainly in the mix,
I would not wish to be thought sacrilegious,
But despite all your bellows and your kicks,
I really can't make out the great, egregious,
Heroic patriots in repetition tedious.

You bellow forth about your honesty,
A drunken man has also that bad habit;
And then, like drunken men, you disagree;
Though, when there's money going, you can grab it.
I do not say that Washington would nab it,
He was a gentleman, and not a glutton,
But now the secret's out, and all can blab it,
He always had his sherry and his mutton,
And, as for equal rights, he scarcely cared a button.

For did he not, with tariffs and with banks,
Build up a system for the moneyed classes?
I know that all who say so are called cranks,
Or anarchists, who seek to rouse the masses,
But still the fact remains. And what surpasses
Even the self-complacent class stupidity
Is how the masses, or, I should say, asses,
Are led along inane in their cupidity,
Or driven when there's need, ruled by their own timidity.

'Tis quite the fashion now for politicians,
Indeed, it is a world-old, weary fashion,
To entertain the crowd, like shrewd magicians,
With tricks they need not openly spend cash on;
A war was once the way to lay the lash on,
And then march home with great display of bunting;
And, still, it stirs us with a lively passion,
But, failing that, up starts a pudgy runting
And gets the same result by simply going hunting.

Of course, he has to work the magazines
For all they're worth; (which isn't very much);
But then, when they have set their huge machines
To turning out the copy, there is such
A nauseous fog poured from their mighty hutch
The public's quite o'erwhelmed with civet stench,
And, lacking, in surprise, both cane and crutch,
Sinks back quite breathless on the waiting bench,
And hands in ticket 'straight', without strength to retrench.

It is a doughty deed to kill a bear,
With body-guard behind to make it safe;
The papers tell about it everywhere,
And, if one misses, none would think to chafe
Such sensitive and self-complacent waif;
Besides, the camera is taking pictures,
And interruptions would be quite unsafe,
There's always complication in such mixtures,
And damage and expense for heroes and for fixtures.

'Tis very sad our heroes all are fat:
It seems to be a circumstance arising
From strenuous living, or from standing pat
When money interests are round advising
The best retreat from campaign advertising;
It surely sometimes gets to be no joke,
One's so confused with all the compromising
He loses balance in the cheers and smoke,
And when the day-light comes, he finds his head in soak.

Uneasy is the head that wears a crown:
But oh, a plaguey sight uneasier
Is one that has to humble and bow down
To slide into the presidential chair!
And even when it is established there,
'Tis hardly like to stay there very firm;
Scarce time to get a shave and grease its hair,
Before the body soon begins to squirm
With wondering what 'twill do to get a second term.

Some think to be a simple senator
Pays better: and with nothing like the risk,
Of course the honor is worth working for;
At the word working, please see asterisk,
With note of explanation curt and brisk,
That working here means cheating, stealing, lying;
Bui how to make these words for honor frisk,
Proved for the author to be task so trying
'Twas left the editor, whose brass there's no denying.

I never shall forget my disappointment
At my first sight of Washington D. C.;
As child I had been rubbed with sacred ointment
Made by most patriotic recipe,
The label read, 'for life and liberty
And the pursuit of happiness', I think;
So far, pursuit was only known to me;
But now I felt myself upon the brink
Of new experience. I was: alas, - to sink.

The capitol itself seemed made of paper,
So thin and white and flimsy were its walls:
From cupola down to the very scraper
It seemed a sham for false memorials.
I hastened on, into its staring halls,
The Senate, I was told, was now in session;
Once in the gallery, I heard the bawls
Of some cheap brewer, judging from the fashion
In which he lost his breath, also his self-possession.

I looked again. These were not business men,
Not the strong faces and curt brevity
We meet with, in our private dealings, when
We have occasion or necessity;
These are more like the hanger-on we see
Outside the private office, men who wait
To get the dirty jobs that all agree
Are better done outside of honor's gate,
For business can't afford to quite ignore the State.

We see such men, sometimes, collecting bills,
Bad bills requiring cunning or brutality:
Their method of approaching always fills
Our minds with doubts as to their own legality;
Then, too, that red-faced shifting-eyed mentality
Has something that arouses our suspicion,
Pretended frankness and verbose banality,
I think now that you have my definition
Of U. S. Senator, without a sole condition.

They sat there sprawling in their red plush chairs,
How politicians favor crimson plush!
Nor could black coats, gold chains, and silver hairs
Hide their vulgarity and brains of mush,
Their speeches were a heavy dribbling slush
Delivered with a cock-a-doodle-doo,
Quite ludicrous considering the hush
Or stupor that prevailed till they got through;
When up another rose, and started out anew.

I fled. The House of Representatives
Was my next venture, for 'twas growing late,
And seeing only half of Congress gives
A false impression. They were in debate.
The scene conveyed me back to that fond date
When, seniors in the high-school, pompous, stern,
We blustered, bellowed, with mock looks of hate,
Each one solicitous to have his turn,
The question being often, 'Shall we now adjourn?'

So was the question here. And all the tricks
That we had tried in Robert's Rules of Order
Were being here employed: the aim, to mix
The speaker up, and bully the recorder,
That some slick member might the time embroider
With wordy nothings done extemporaneous,
Till some, grown weary, hanging round the border,
And having pressing calls contemporaneous,
Should leave the room; as I did, instantaneous.

And I reflected, going to my lodging,
Is it then possible that I have seen
In this cheap schoolboy's scrapping and hodge-podging
Our country's legislators, in convene?
Is our Republic in its peace serene
Controlled by this tobacco-spitting nest
Of demagogues and office-grabbers keen?
And do we boast our government the best?
I packed my grip and took the first train for the West.

So let us do. Nor let us further wonder
Why our two boys were willing to defer
Decision of the powers they flourished under;
So far, their right had met no challenger.
If, through their ignorance, they seemed to err,
The fault could be forgiven, overlooked,
To-day no priest or parent could deter
Their pleasure; all had been so snugly booked:
They even carried food; which night before was cooked.

When the long day of freedom and of laughter
Was folded up in darkness and put by,
With speculations on what might come after,
The boys stole in the house with watchful eye,
Thinking the temper of the place to try
Before they came out with a bold assertion,
They'd wait for questions of where, when, and why,
Before they put forth very much exertion,
Perhaps no one had noticed their desertion.

Nor had they; for they entertained a stranger,
No other than the wily-eyed Joaquin
This indefatigable desert ranger,
Suspecting that Young Maverick's flight had been
Along the river, the wild rocks between,
Had followed on, in hope of sign or token.
Till night approaching, he had well foreseen
'Twere better that his lodgings were bespoken,
Since here he had a friend whose bread he oft had broken.

Bernardo's father owned the village mill
Also a modest farm, quite well-to-do;
His hospitality and calm good will
Were famous all that desert country through.
Had it so chanced for either me or you
To cross his threshold, entertainment seeking,
His first words would have been, with greetings due,
'This house is yours; we wait but for your speaking.'
His household, like his mill, moved without even creaking.

Don Gabriel they called him, and his wife
Was Donya Ana, a mild gentle mother;
To have such sweet companion though his life
Could hardly make the miller any other
Than sympathetic, universal brother;
Their life was like their river, a calm stream,
Refreshing all those plants that choke and smother
Where the hot sands with potent forces teem,
But need the waters' flow their passions to redeem.

Within their house, the hall, both wide and roomy,
Was cool and white with even sanded floor;
A northerner might find it somewhat gloomy,
Having no furniture in cluttered store;
On entering the deep-jambed, linteled door
One caught no glimpse of tables, beds or chairs,
Only a sense of peace came stealing o'er
His mind and body, driving out all cares,
And bringing gratitude to bless him unawares.

A mat of woven straw lay wide extended
Upon the ground, and centering on that
A square of linen, white and neatly mended,
Displayed their simple provender, whereat
The guests encircling either crouched or sat
All quite at ease, and with a subtle grace
Such as we see in supple acrobat,
And all impossible where hard chairs place
The joints in angles harsh, their beauty to deface.

The candle-light, with fitful wavering flicker,
Illuminated this domestic group,
When our two culprits crept in from the thicker
Outlying shadows, with a timid stoop
And bob, but keeping eye-lids well a-droop
While paying court'sy to the stranger guest,
They quickly made excuse to reach and scoop
Such food as had been left them by the rest
Into their waiting mouths with much apparent zest.

Not one gave them marked notice or attention,
The father but a glance to satisfy
Himself that they were well, and made no mention
Of their long absence, while the mother's eye
Showed her content to have them sitting nigh;
She sent her daughter Julia for more cake
And softly stroked Francisco on the thigh,
Smiling to see what inroad he could make
On the great bowl of lentils set there for his sake.

In natural progress of the conversation
They learned the cause of Joaquin's visit there;
They also heard in full the explanation
That legal ownership of horse or mare
Was granted to the one who could ensnare
The same when running free without a brand;
But that, in this case, of a breed so rare,
Don Pancho would reward with willing hand,
And offer purchase fee no poor man could withstand.

Without a word the boys stole softly out
To hold a consultation and to see
If they, in some way, without risk or doubt,
Could not retain the horse and lose the fee;
Bernardo's father for a certainty,
Francisco's guardian he also was,
Would never to their ownership agree,
For moral right, more strongly than the laws,
Would hold him bound to see Don Pancho's rightful cause.

All this the boys had learned, and now in sorrow
They went once more down to the weedy croft;
Francisco, bitter that the coming morrow
Should tear his love from his affections soft,
In piteous cries raised up his voice, and oft
Called on the saints to help him, wildly weeping,
Turning his streaming face to them aloft,
Beseeching they would take him to their keeping,
Refusing to return for solace or for sleeping.

And when Young Maverick met them in the dark,
And rubbed his nose on poor Francisco's shoulder,
And heard the dry sobs rising deep and stark
Within that breast now to his touch grown colder
He felt within himself a grief to smoulder,
He could not give it name in his dumb mind,
But it were plain to any fair beholder
He felt a sympathy like human kind;
To see not this in truth were surely to be blind.

Bernardo, looking on, still meditated
How they might overcome his threatened blow;
The boy and colt were all too fairly mated,
It were a pity not to leave them so;
Sadly he gazed on poor Francisco's woe,
And slowly in his thoughts a plan was formed,
He was a man, now, and the horse you know,
Was legally Francisco's; thus he warmed
Up to the argument while poor Francisco stormed.

When the first burst of bitter grief was over,
He got Francisco to lend willing ear;
Young Maverick content to seek some clover
That grew but sparsely in the region near;
And gradually the tempest seemed to clear,
The boys went back conversing earnestly,
Brown Pony also seemed to feel the cheer,
The stars once more were twinkling merrily,
And night was for their rest as it should ever be.

Next morning, shrewd Bernardo, very grave,
Approached his father asking for permission,
With hint of rights that his new manhood gave,
To go off on a little expedition
Unto a neighboring town, an ancient mission;
His father had a brother living there
Who was a priest; for still the church tradition
Lingered throughout the drying desert air,
Though for the faith or church most men had little care.

It seemed a very reasonable request;
A widowed sister living there as well
Would gladly have Bernardo for a guest,
'Twould be a change for him, and who could tell
But he might learn to read a bit and spell,
A thing he'd never done at home in school;
The priestly influence with book and bell
Might serve to keep his growing passions cool
Till he himself had proved at least not quite a fool.

But then, there was Francisco, what of him?
The pony would be needed for the trip.
It fairly made Don Gabriel's eyes grow dim
To think that they must give the boy the slip.
Bernardo hinted, with a quivering lip
That he might take Francisco, since to leave him
Would certainly his childish pleasures clip,
He could not think to wilfully deceive him,
And riding off alone, most bitterly would grieve him.

So it was settled. Would he start next week?
Bernardo thought 'twere better done today
The dawn bid fair. He only had to seek
The pony and set out upon the way.
He'd send a letter back to safely say
They had arrived. The priest would see to that.
And then, half pleading, and yet half in play,
Suggested he might wear the drawers and hat
Befitting to a youth who changes habitat.

His father hesitated, laughed, consented,
And led the way down to the village shop;
Bernardo, feeling very well contented,
Still felt his conscience take a doleful drop;
At one time he had half a mind to stop
And tell his father all; but compromised
By saying sternly, now he'd reached the top
Of manhood, he must show himself full-sized,
Keep his own counsel, too, and not be patronized.

They chose a hat with silver laced and banded,
A noble one, wide brimmed and pointed crown,
It certainly had easily commanded
The admiration of a larger town
Than any of geography renown.
A buckskin thong dropped just across his chin
Still innocent of any faintest down,
But growing manly now, and well bound in,
Kept all in proper place as firm as pride, or sin.

Then from a pile of blankets they selected
A glowing beauty; yellow, red, and blue,
For quality and size, as well, elected,
One that would serve his entire manhood through.
This was for coat and cloak, and cover, too,
Where'er he chose to fix his future bed.
They tested warp and woof to prove them true,
His father gravely giving shake of head,
Saying in his young days their praise was merited.

Back to the house to find the mother tearful,
But proud, as well, to bring, of linen white,
Wide shirt and drawers, she being somewhat fearful
He had not grown enough to fill them quite:
Bernardo showed her proudly that his height
Was equal to his father's when he bore
Himself erect, as now full well he might;
So, without more ado, they draped him o'er
With the long garments pure, the wide legs brushed the floor.

He surely was a beauteous sight to see
When Julia bound a sash about his waist,
Pale pink and blue and fringed most prettily,
With her deft hands arranged with dainty taste;
Herself, a simple frock of muslin graced,
Her dark hair gathered into heavy braid,
And on her knees, to see the sash well placed,
They gave a pretty picture, youth and maid,
The parents standing by more soberly arrayed.

But what, all this time, was Francisco doing
That he this transformation did not laud?
The truth is ere the dawn the East was wooing
He had been up and running far abroad,
All night vague fears his tender heart had gnawed,
And now he sought the croft like restless lover,
His spirit by its own forebodings awed,
His hope still panting breathless to discover
The pale gold ghost beloved that somewhere there must hover.

His call, the pony answered, faithful ever,
And hopeful, which is very useful too:
He found her browsing close down by the river,
And, looming in the darkness, proving true,
His precious steed, his treasure stood in view:
He did not wait this time for words of greeting,
But on the pony's back without ado
He sought a shallow ford, where waters fleeting,
Sang of the march of time without pause or retreating.

A low clear call to make Young Maverick follow,
A crunch of sand beneath the pony's tread,
Then cool within the flowing flood they wallow,
Soft on the flanks as downy silken bed,
Young Maverick willing when the pony led,
And soon the coming bank with silent grasses
Affords a steadiness for whirling head,
Dark green with mystery of shadow-masses,
Beneath its base the swirl of silvery surface passes.

A falling shallow and an upward lunge,
A sturdy scramble up the slippery steep,
Down which the rolling stones, with hollow plunge,
Like frogs into their native shelter leap;
Abrupt the rising cliffs, like castles, keep
The wanderers from the mountain wastes beyond,
Upon a stealthy path that low doth creep
Along the river's bank, held here in bond
By the rock rugged heights that to the skies respond.

Francisco had this path as well committed
To his young memory, as boy of twelve,
With us, in school, beleagured and be-cited,
Has his small library to shift and shelve;
In either case as ax fits to the helve,
So fits the eager mind to what it chooses;
Nor is there need for it to dig and delve,
It gets the gold, and not a moment loses,
'Tis but the dross we urge it carelessly refuses.

At twelve, I think we all are geniuses,
At fourteen, we, alas, begin to know it;
Perhaps it is King Solomon who says
To lose a treasure one but needs to show it;
To learn our wealth is certainly to blow it;
And then when all is gone, heroically,
We take the empty purse and safe bestow it,
Our memory that is, and though, we dally,,
In time we tread erect humiliation's valley.

Francisco, having genius, knew it not;
He watched the dawn as it began to lighten,
His gaze quick settling on one special spot
Marked by the cliffs that there begin to heighten,
Already the dun east their high tops brighten,
The river swings about with sudden curve,
The rising cliffs his narrow pathway tighten,
Then suddenly swing back with generous swerve,
And yield a valley hid behind their stern reserve.

This valley holds the path of their day's journey,
But that is not the path he now will seek;
A grove of sycamores with green roots ferny
Marks there the outlet of a tiny creek,
Brown Pony knows the way, he need not speak
Or point it out, so oft have they together
Lived there in loneliness of childish pique;
Full gallop, now, with lightness of a feather,
His legs are brushing soon the aromatic heather.

Behind this grove a deep box-canyon offers
A safe retreat and keep for their young charge.
As safe as gold in native rock-bound coffers,
But room enough to let him stray at large;
A narrow pass, where waters there discharge,
Has been closed up with stony barricade,
A native fortress whose protecting targe
Gave shelter from the wild Apache's raid,
In days so long gone by one need not be afraid.

And through this wall the stream had forced a wicket,
Which some ingenious, enterprising man
Had closed again with light poles, making picket;
The narrow gate was easy thus to span;
A safe enclosure was the author's plan,
And easily accomplished in a minute;
Beneath the poles the quiet water ran;
And, once an animal was safely in it,
The strong bars held him fast as cage doth hold a linnet.

'Twas, for Francisco, but a half hour's task
To have Young Maverick stowed safe away.
Nor did the trusting yearling seem to ask
Why he was not allowed at large to stray,
So easily doth love o'er wildness sway,
The boy, retreating, called a brief good bye,
It seemed no more than some new game to play,
And they were let depart with scarce a sigh,
Or any hint of fear, they would not backward hie.

Thus was it when Bernardo, fully dressed,
Was strutting round the house in preparation
For his first journey from the parent nest,
Francisco, overcome with admiration
For this momentous sudden elevation,
Slipped shyly up to him like faithful squire,
And said, by way of humble explanation,
The horse was ready, what would he require
In further service done, like one who works for hire.

And all this play Joaquin without suspicion,
Joaquin, the wily-eyed, saw going on,
And even gave his aid, which his position
As honored guest allowed to myrmidon;
Some one remarked Francisco's face looked wan
He had not slept well in the night, he said,
Perhaps to see the grand Bernardo don
Such manly garments had gone to his head,
Or made him envious to stand there in his stead.

So the acequia in the desert, peaceful,
Slips smilingly its grassy banks between,
But having little fall, its way more easeful,
Finds time to dwell with interruptions green,
The fairest little creatures ever seen
Of semi-tropic flowers with waxen petals,
The while there towers to the sky serene
A stately palm, whose roots make cunning wattles
Through which the waters weave their never weary shuttles.

And willows pollarded in gray cocâdes
Will sometimes intersperse the stately palms,
Or wild acacias with their flowered shades
Will fill the languid air with fragrant balms,
The waters, singing ever grateful psalms,
Glide on beneath their shelter peacefully,
Reflecting now the green that cools and calms,
Or sailing out to catch the blue sky free,
Alike, in shade or sun, in vibrant ecstacy.

In telling of these things I call to mind
One dark wild desert guide whose visage grim
Was but a mask the which there lurked behind
A wisdom one would scarce suspect in him;
A straggling beard, eyes with the light made dim,
Fantastic dress, half laborer, half clown,
Bolt upright on his pony stiff and prim,
A feather fluttering in his hat's peak'd crown,
With long and bare extent of wrist and ankle brown.

Thinking to talk with him in idle way,
I asked him, one day, whether he were wed;
His voice burst out much like a donkey's bray,
A harshness I had hardly merited,
'No, nor I never will be,' so he said,
'Until I have a bank of silver.' Then
The rigid stillness of the sphinx's head
Came over him, nor did it soften when
I made so bold to speak and question him again.

This time they made straight road for the acacias
That fringed the border of a small canal.
In Mexico, they call these things acequias,
A pretty word, and quaintly pastoral;
We have no word that's quite reciprocal;
We call them simply irrigating ditches;
Lacking, you see, all sound poetical,
And though the rhymes are plentiful as stitches,
They almost all are vulgar, except niches.

Now an acequia leading from a river
Is even prettier than its aqueous parent.
Just as a gift is prettier than a giver,
A daughter than her mother, though, inherent,-
We'll not delay, - the truth is so apparent,
But follow on with our landscape description,
And not, like reckless fool-hardy knight errant,
Fall into wayside quarrel or conniption,
Tracing back origins to source at least Egyptian.

How often we have watched a mill-race running
Along the bank or through a sterile meadow,
Where wet-stemmed grasses green were idly sunning
Their leaves that kept the blue-eyed stars in shadow,
How we have liked their buoyant fresh bravado,
Pushing their standards up to show their rank,
Quite careless that they crowd out maid and widow
That grow outside their rich, well watered bank,
Replete with life and strength that they so lately drank.

While, between banks, the placid slipping waters
Glide on to turn the mill-wheel, calmly smiling,
Full heedless that some favored sons and daughters
Through hidden roots their treasures are beguiling,
Content are they, this peaceful respite whiling
To flow without resistance, silently,
Until, with rush, they leap from out their tiling
To tread the sullen mill-wheel splashingly,
Then join the river's force to hurry to the sea.

For were you not a boy, once, long ago?
Unless, alas, you may have been a girl?
I have been told that girls do not do so.
I only know a woman loves a pearl
No whit the less, if custom-office churl
Has been deceived, and it is deftly smuggled.
She likes to tell the story, and to twirl
The bauble on her finger, which has juggled
More pearls than one, I ween, while men have vainly struggled.

To be a little bad in the beginning,
And later on to lead more moral lives,
Is it not better than a life-time's sinning
That goes on with our sisters and our wives?
Of course some woman-moralist contrives
An explanation for their peca-dilloes;
I don't deny that even man connives,
And bolsters up her argument with pillows,
Seeking indeed to prove our laurels are but willows.

I'll none of them; but back unto my story:
The bags were filled and on the pony's back,
Who, now deprived of all the morning's glory,
Becomes a very ordinary hack.
But patiently she plods the dusty track,
Once more goes through the river steadily,
Bernardo's hat now rides upon the pack,
And in the water both sport merrily,
As innocent of clothes as they from cares are free.

Then on again to find Young Maverick waiting,
Delighted at this game of hide-and-seek;
They push away the poles that form the grating,
And spatter through the tiny, flashing creek;
The pack is lifted from the pony meek;
And all are free for food, or rest, or play,
Provisions plenty for full many a week,
And little chance that any spy should stray
Or give them there surprise, far from the beaten way.

I wish I could describe the rugged beauty
Of this box-canyon chosen for retreat;
The name is ugly, but I feel my duty
Compels it, if description be complete;
In Spanish tongue the sound is much more sweet;
Box seems a word most unpoetical;
Nor does its meaning either quite compete
With that wild Spanish word, half guttural,
Half aspirate, cajon, and wholly musical.

Behind the gate, like amphitheatre
The walls fell back, from grassy esplanade.
A wide arena where that conqueror,
Old Geologic Time, alone had played:
The ages gazing down still undismayed
To see the slowness of their crumbling stone,
Whereon the creeping vegetation made
A soft green carpet, whence our palm had grown,
Lifting its plummy top, silent, at peace, alone.

The rivulet flowed o'er this flower-flecked meadow,
Winding full leisurely its glittering thread,
Pausing in pool to catch the soothing shadow
Of the great palm tree's noble, lofty head,
Then down across the slope in laughter sped,
And out the little barricaded door,
Content to leave this chamber of the dead,
And seek the stream along the desert's floor,
Bounding adown the steep with mimic rush and roar.

We trace it backward, rather; for our heart
Yearns for the deeps of earth, the solitude;
We cross the meadow till the hills apart
Cleave into rocky chasm wild and rude,
Great boulders in our path lie stark and nude,
Flesh-tints of pink and creamy porphyry,
Smooth as the un-kissed cheek of maidenhood,
Flushing with rose-tints 'neath the evening sky,
Soft as a song of old in Love's first lullaby.

Around among them curl the living water,
A maiden's tress against their rounded cheek:
Give back our heart, thou rigid sphinx-like daughter,
'Tis deeper in earth's bowels we would seek:
The water curdles in th'ascended creek,
Grows opalescent, then more dense, like jade;
And, closing in, the giant cliffs o'erwreak
A tragic solemnness of gloomy shade,
The like of which, we think, the gates of death are made.

We go still deeper; higher, and yet higher
Rise up the rocks, as straight as plummet line.
Should prisoned bird from here the light desire,
'Twould mount a mile in spiral serpentine
Ere it could catch the breath of plains divine,
The upland mountain-slopes, whereof the view
Gives down the continent where rivers shine,
Pale threads of silver, sewing up the blue
Of wide horizon's hem her garment to renew.

But down with us, all that we know of Heaven
Is that blue path far, far above the head;
To span it one would need scarce two times seven
Of measured feet across the zenith's bed;
The same below the stream has carpeted.
The reverent waters lave our pigmy feet;
The river walls deepen to dusky red,
While jet-black banners stain the death-like street,
And there is naught of life the lonely eye to meet.

We go still onward, till the rocks, relenting,
Fall back a yard or two to give us breath;
Nor are their sullen sides quite now preventing
A little life in those grim guts of death;
Sparse drops of moisture faint green quickeneth,
It is the far-famed resurrection-plant,
Compact rosettes the desert nourisheth,
And winds drop down within this fissure scant,
By grinding earthquake cracked when struggling mountains
pant.

Spangling the sullen walls with mossy verdure,
They rise in trail of emerald galaxy;
Wherever drop of damp their roots can nurture
They flock like milky-way across the sky;
We bless them for their hope as we pass by;
And back the rocky walls fall further yet,
Until a rounded well around doth lie,
O'er whose rock bottom the thread rivulet
Chains the huge boulder beads whose sides the waters fret.

And midst these boulders grow white sycamores,
Tall otherwheres, but here like sprays of moss;
And back behind the cavern's riven doors
Comes a faint spray that sometimes drifts across
The open well whose sides it doth emboss
With other verdure, brown-stemmed maiden-hair,
Whose ferny fronds drink deep the treasured loss
The roaring waterfall from out his lair
Scatters adown the shaft of green-hued breathless air.

Another tree with monstrous leathern leaves,
Its pale trunk whiter than the sycamore,
Like ivy vine the jagged fissure weaves,
Clambering from up the rugged boulder floor;
It seems to fear the torrent's rising roar,
And fearful elings like rain-washed sun-bleached roots,
Atremble lest the earth-locked granite door
Should burst asunder clearing wide the chutes,
And leave it like worn grass the autumn brook recruits.

The stately sycamores know naught of fear:
Like flowers in planted garden-bed they stand
Graceful, erect, their white boles splotted with queer
Green stains as painted by a careless hand;
Their calm leaves dwell in an enchanted land,
No winds to whisper them to sleep or wake,
Sometimes one falls upon the bedded sand,
Or drifts, a boat upon some mimic lake,
A yellow leaf long thrall'd that thirsting death doth slake.

Within these boughs two little birds are flitting,
Two wood-peckers, with gleaming ruby crest;
The change of upper world they seem outwitting,
As dwelling in eternal summer's nest;
The downy silver sheen upon their breast
Is like the white of their protecting trees;
Their beady eyes still eager in the quest
Of vagrant bugs or sky-lost flies or bees
That know not how to rise from such strange deeps as these.

We journey on to seek the waterfall.
Pale granite towers like rising obelisks
Obstruct our path, and in gay madrigal
The blithesome water o'er their surface whisks;
The clinging maiden-hair her green frond frisks
Like fluttering kerchiefs edged with gleaming pearls;
And soft begonias turn leaf hairy disks
To hide their blooms as jealous head-shawl churls
Conceal the waxen charms of fair-faced Mexic girls.

Clinging to roots, we mount a giant boulder
And round a winging gateway-stone so high
Its lilac shelf brushes the mountain's shoulder
That bounds our narrow vision of the sky;
A hooded pulpit keeps a small place dry
From falling spray that like a cobweb veil
Descends from out the zenith's canopy,
A breathless leap, with high-rung lonely wail,
As when wild polar winds lash the green icebergs pale.

Within our pulpit-hood we pause to grieve
That all our climbing has availed us naught
Of cataract in grandeur, when faint heave,
As some one sighing, our numbed ear has caught;
We sharply turn, with awe and fear o'erwrought,
And spy a little trickling waterfall,
With diamonds, emerald, and silver fraught,
Bannered with fluttering fern along the wall,
Purple of sculptured niche for nature's virginal;

And just within the corner of our gaze
Flashes a flitting nyad from our sight;
Her mossy grotto gemmed with thousand sprays
Remains to prove whence was her sudden flight;
Poor trembling thing in palpitating fright,
We wait in reverence praying her return,
But shrilling laughter from the fountain's height
Tells us she must all human presence spurn,
Though with the grief of night our sad hearts dully burn.

We look into the flashing rainbow falling,
We think we see the gleam of tapered limbs,
We listen to the echoes calling, calling,
Our eyes the weeping spray with tears bedims;
Is it the brown-stemmed fern that quaintly trims
Her oval face 'twixt upward flashing arms?
Is it the curling spray that lightly limns
Her half-seen features modest with alarms?
Or is it true our gaze wounds her with mortal harms?

We sit long waiting in the wondrous well,
In which the water leaps from out the blue;
We seem to hear faint ringing of a knell,
Or is it of new birth we listen to?
We cannot pass again our chasm through;
We only hope the maiden, finally.
Will softly our faint dreams of life renew;
We close our eyes: we will not look to see
Her timid presence felt, but not quite known to be.

CANTO V

'Twas poet's fashion, in the olden time,
When thoughts were lagging, to evoke the muses.
It seems a pity when one's verse and rhyme
Are running freely that his head refuses
To furnish more ideas than it chooses;
But such seems now my case, at least in satires;
Up to this time the spirit that abuses
Has held most lordly sway in various matters
Till institutions frail have all been torn to tatters.

And now I find the worst fate for a scold
Is to find nothing wrong to scold about.
Is it a sign that I am growing old,
Or that my peevish pen is tired out?
It used to be the easiest thing to spout
For hours together on all sorts of rubbish:
The government, our plutocratic gout,
No want of subjects if one's feeling cubbish,
The world is always stored with food Beelzebubbish.

Perhaps I've read too much Sir Walter Scott,
He always puts me in such easy humor,
I quite forget society is hot
With fever from some money-festering tumor.
'Tis easy to neglect the current rumor
When wrapped up in historical romances;
And problems of producer and consumer
Must stand aside awaiting their poor chances
When kings converse for me and tread their fancy dances.

Sometimes I peep into a modern poet
Like Arthur Symons, vaguely beautiful,
Who loves but love, not caring who shall know it;
I wonder that he never finds it dull.
For me, I soon am stupid as a gull,
I get loved out and can't begin all over,
Just as I'm now run out of vitriol;
And when my satires should be deep in clover
I'm out of words and breath, like Frenchman just in Dover.

There lies a mountain valley in the South,
Turning its grassy face up to the sun;
And, notwithstanding inland desert's drouth,
A little smiling rivulet doth run
Tinkling the flowers' bells in playful fun,
Ah, me! it makes me be a child again!
I know the daisies there, know every one;
I think should any die I'd feel the pain,
My memory holds them all in gladsome glossy train.

And from the meadow's sward rise granite domes
Mottled in pink and purple porphyry;
Some low are built to shelter dwarfish gnomes,
Some rising high in great cathedrals free,
Buttressed with towers like those beyond the sea;
But naught of paths or streets wind in between;
Only the grasses in gay parquetry
Of flowers of blue and white amid the green,
Or distant red and gold on the broad plain are seen.

And fencing in the meadows rise pale cliffs
Softened with blooming shrubs and fringe of trees;
Whence wafted downward in faint fragrant whiffs
Come thoughts of wood-birds and of bustling bees;
The butterflies, like yellow argosies,
Sail fluttering o'er the billowing feathered grass,
Bearing from rock to rock their embassies,
Mooring at flowerets as they lightly pass,
Startling the placid sky in the brook's looking-glass.

High in these cliffs of sand-stone lie deep caves
Scooped by a mighty river, long ago
In geologic era, when its waves
Broke from the glaciers and the gathered snow
The wasted mountains now no longer know;
Their floods have long since left the river's bed;
Only the tinkling rivulet doth flow
To whisper of the epochs, long since dead,
Among the grass and flowers, by man inherited.

But centuries ere Europeans came,
There dwelt a gentle race on this green plot:
Brown-haired, sweet-faced, of habits mild and tame,
Sharing the fields and woods in common lot;
Their ancestry, their end, we know it not;
We only know that many generations
Grew up and died in this enchanted spot;
And cities showed the wealth and pride of nations,
Dead and forgotten now save in vague speculations.

At one time all the wide environed hills
Were banded with their garden terraces;
Back miles on miles the ruined remnant fills
Each cove and glen with walled interstices;
We know not what the sphinx-like silences
Could tell of balmy days of frequent rains,
Or whether tilling and the growth of trees
Could soften up the clime to yield its grains
And fruits which son of man alone by sweat obtains.

The high cliff-caves old relics hold in trust;
For villages are built in those grim maws,
And streets strewn o'er with centuries of dust
Give proof of order and of social laws;
And curious temples make explorers pause
To wonder at their meaning and their shape,
Crude minarets like huge jars without flaws,
As if some giant potter tried to ape
The jugs and funeral urns that from their graves we rape.

Another time, upon a balcony,
While I was watching the faint purple bloom
On distant cliffs, I seemed to hear a sigh
As coming from the little windowed room
Close at my shoulder in the cavern's gloom;
I turned, and faint upon the window-sill,
I saw a hand-print, pure in outline, loom
Pink through the whitewash; it was quivering still
Or so it seemed to me, my heart was all a-thrill.

It seemed a maiden's hand but freshly dipped
In the pink ocher used to rouge the cheeks;
As if in eagerness her foot had slipped
And in regaining balance, as one seeks
To do, perhaps, when some one quickly speaks,
The hand had pressed against the whitened wall,
The imprint of those countless little streaks
That mark the yielding flesh of finger ball
Were left for me to read, I could have told them all:

I did not, but I planned a pretty story
Of a young Indian maid who had a lover,
And how expecting him in all his glory,
And looking out the window to discover, -
But interruption came; I had to shove her.
'Twas Dick with scientific instruments;
One gloating pause in ethnologic hover,
Then down he reached in pocket of his pants,
And pulled his ruler out and took the measurements.

One day it was my fortune to have wandered
Too far from camp, and quick night coming on,
Now conscious that the day-light had been squandered
I was considering what might be done,
When my companion boy, a Mexican,
Suggested we take lodgings with the ancients;
They would not grudge a night spent just for fun,
Considering the fact that we were transients,
And had respect for them with naught against our conscience.

Accordingly we galloped toward a cave
Easy of access; and, our horses leading,
Climbed the steep slope on which the entrance gave,
Just as the sunlight, in the West receding,
Left all the sky for love and sadness bleeding,
Till we approached the glooming, yawning maw,
I now confess I was my courage needing,
Then in we walked beneath the lifted jaw,
A spookier place, I thought, I scarcely ever saw.

We made our camp upon the little plaza,
The axis of the radiating streets;
For this cave being high had no piazza
Or closing wall, which oftener one meets;
We did not choose the sheltered house retreats;
The rooms were very small; a city flat
We think for coziness the whole world beats;
But 'tis a palace when compared to that;
Some rooms there were so small they'd cramp a lady's hat.

The cave extended back some twenty paces,
The rock roof sloping downward to the floor;
And filling all the intervening spaces
Between the streets, as I have said before,
The walled apartments were; each with its door,
Its tiny suite of bedrooms, more like cupboards;
Three stories high they were, or even four,
And bare of furnishing as Mother Hubbard's
When she the bone did seek that was that laughing lubbard's.

While I along these caverned streets was wandering
Peering into the long-deserted rooms,
Doubtless upon time's swiftness sadly pondering
The whole cave lighted up from out the glooms,
Like a stage picture when the red light looms,
And then I heard the wild and buoyant laughter
Of my gay Mexic-boy, the best of grooms,
Having the horses fed, and well looked after,
Kindled a blazing fire to cheer our rock-bound rafter.

How beautiful he was, this living creature
Laughing against the cavern of bleak death!
The fire-light flickers on each changing feature
As round his little camp he hurrieth;
There still remains enough of merry breath
To break into a cheery welcome song,
Sweetness of youth, the fond song lightly saith,
The echoes ring the sounding roof along
And sides take up the clamor: dong, ding-dong, ding-dong.

I found that he had spread our meager table,
A napkin on the blankets on the ground,
Arranging all as well as he was able
To make it seem that plenty did abound;
Some cakes from luncheon and some meat were found,
A flask of water from the stream below,
What more was needed when good cheer went round
And from his lips the boyish talk did flow,
Questions of life once here in ages long ago?

And how our picture-city laughed and sparkled
With tiny towers and quaint minaret,
While in the backward streets the shadows darkled,
In doors and windows, too, the gloom was set,
A radiant blackness there like gleaming jet,
While round our fire the blankets red and gay,
It was a sight I never can forget,
And songs again to chase the shades away,
Songs still of youth and love, with merry roundelay.

But soon the rolling smoke like clouds engathered
Descended in a heavy purple pall;
'Twas well our horses now outside were tethered,
Though within hearing of a sound or call,
Slowly the level sheet did fall and fall,
'Till just above our faces now it hovered,
And there remained: not troubling us at all
As on our bedded blankets snugly covered,
We watched the gleam of moon that our cave's door discovered

Whether the fire that now was burnt to embers
Had all its quantity of smoke exhausted,
Or that the ground on which our tired members
The ends of which the coals so snugly toasted,
Could not by falling curtain be accosted
Because of being lower than cave exit,
I do not know. Our noses were not frosted,
Though down so close our lightest breath could mix it
Floated the level cloud to breathe which would asphyxiate.

We slept; and merrily the morning sun
Looked in upon us, where the smoke, dispelled,
Left not a trace of what our fire had done,
No remnant of it even could be smelled,
So thoroughly the outward air all quelled;
We saddled horses, mounted, and away,
For breakfast bells within our stomachs knelled,
And poetry took wings at light of day
Our picture-city now was huts of crumbling clay.

There was another camp with this same youth
In a dead forest, I shall ne'er forget.
We'd found a fossil mammoth-tusk or tooth,
And so to dig it out we bravely set,
A giant circle, smooth and black as jet,
But very crumbly and soon went to powder,
We thought the sun might harden it, and let
It stay a day to dry. I ne'er felt prouder
Than when I gazed on it. A slight shower made all chowder.

But 'tis the forest I would tell you of;
The trees were all wild locusts, but all dead.
It seemed that years had passed since green thing throve,
The very shrubs showed life had long since fled
From out their branches disinherited.
The bark was gone from all. Pale silver-gray
Were all the withered trunks. The soil, dull red,
Looked like the burned-out ashes of bright clay
That in a fire has burned and crumbled quite away.

And over all glowed the fierce desert sky:
And nowhere was there shade from that fierce heat;
The topmost twigs were white and parched and dry
As were the thirsting roots beneath our feet;
And nowhere was there bower or cool retreat,
But when night came with mild refreshing wind,
A murmur as of singing, soft and sweet
Swept through the branches that long years had thinned,
And with the midnight wailed like lost souls that have sinned.

Our camp-fire was a huge one, and we sang
And laughed aloud to greet the leaping flames;
We called until the tingling branches rang,
And challenged Echo with our boyish games;
Such merriment the very darkness shames;
And when, aweary, we lay down to rest,
We did not sleep; but gave the stars fond names
After such friends as we might like the best,
And who in spirit now might come to us in quest.

We laid the stories of our lives together
To see where they were different or alike;
We tried to catch the future, and to tether
Her feet; or fence her with enclosing dike
That she might not apart our friendship strike.
We knew it could not be, and yet we dreamed;
We made the future for ourselves; belike
It was as if the present only seemed,
And all life's years were ours, and all with laughter teemed.

But the week ended, and our camp was broken,
Our horses saddled, and our goods all packed;
A raven flying over, like grim token,
Fell at our feet when the boy's rifle cracked.
It took him but a moment to enact
A curious rite: for, with a bit of string,
He tied the bird, which life so lately lacked,
To an o'er-hanging bough, caught by one wing,
Then leapt upon his horse to lightly shout and sing.

He drove the pack-mules on, while I, more slowly,
Followed behind through the forsaken wood;
He always humored my mild melancholy:
Like a fond dog one loves, he understood.
Our road made sudden turn; he, wheeling, stood
A moment gazing; then, 'look back', he said;
His eyes had haunt of some lost brotherhood.
I turned to see the black bird swinging, dead,
Above our camp-fire's ashes, disinherited.

Don Pancho had been lonely, and had taken
A holiday, to see some neighboring friends.
A two days' ride across the plains forsaken
Had brought him to a river that descends
From snowy peaks and through a valley wends,
Trained into still acequias. There wide gardens
Bask in the sunshine which with moisture blends,
And thus yield to the traveler fragrant pardons
For past of desert heat which toughens while it hardens.

The orange and the lemon join their leaves
Across a cool stone seat in languid bowers;
And in and out the fruited grape-vine weaves
A rustic screen against the passing hours;
And far away the church-bells in white towers
Call out the vespers or the matin prayers;
But heavy fragrance all one's force o'erpowers,
And time slips by unheeded, unawares,
Nor leaves behind of grief, or memory of life's cares.

Don Pancho, mounted on his coal-black stallion,
In velvet suit beaded with silver braid,
His face clean-cut as seen in old medallion,
Though on his lips a smile of pleasure played,
Headed his servient little cavalcade,
Who came along with spurs a-chink and jingle,
Each in his gala costume rich arrayed,
Where brown and blue and purple intermingle
With tassels red and gold of bridle and surcingle.

Three sumpter mules carry the bags and bedding,
And these are fitted out with silver bells;
To see them you would think it was a wedding,
Except the lack of bride or groom dispels
Such thought, but closely it such parallels;
Only Don Pancho is too old and gray,
His riders rather are the gallant swells,
And he, a gentleman, now on his way
To visit friends, no more, and make a little stay.

They enter the white village, deep embowered
With green of fig-trees and black mulberry.
The sanded streets so white seem freshly scoured;
A very beauteous sight it is to see
The cool green shadows on their purity;
The open plaza in the sunlight basks,
With fountains round the margin flowing free,
For sun and water yield all mortal asks,
Where social law doth rule and men shun not their tasks.

They pause before a wide flat entrance-arch
And Marselino, clad in moleskin gray,
Leaps from his horse, and then in modest march
Enters the court as herald, just to say
Don Pancho now is riding by that way:
When quick the major-domo, all a-smile,
Comes out bare-headed, and with gesture gay
Though formal, giving greetings all the while
Ushers them through the gate in royal southern style.

The courtyard is a garden where four palms
Marshall the humble trees and flowering sprays
Whose shaded fragrance the still air embalms
And sanded walks lead on in open ways
To various gates that terminate the maze;
The drive-way, passing through and to the rear,
Enters on smaller court where shouts and neighs
From men and horses speak of servants' cheer,
But with Don Pancho we will rest a moment here.

Two men of easy grace and gentle station
Come forth to greet him, holding out their hands;
Of their embrace I've given explanation,
'Tis very fitting for these tropic lands;
A moment in the shade the small group stands,
Then passes 'long the margin of a pool
Squared in walled cement, whose confining bands,
Reflected in the water deep and cool
Know naught of failing sun or tide of frosty yule.

The fluttering sashes of the men reflected
In the green water are like jewels burning,
'Till somber green of bushes recollected
Is taken back, caused by the pathway's turning;
The laughter of glad friendship's wistful yearning
Comes echoed back to close the magic scene;
We follow in, intent on further learning
What is the welcome of these hosts serene;
Liking so much the king, we hope to see the queen.

A roomy hall with waiting chairs and tables
Gives sense of both seclusion and of space;
Its roof-tree welcome also here enables
A second greeting with more warm embrace;
Full joyously they scan Don Pancho's face,
Ask him a dozen questions, clap his shoulder,
Call out the servants at a lively pace,
Express regret the sherbet is not colder,
A gracious goodly scene to any chance beholder.

The women enter from a room adjoining,
Three of them and a gracious sight to see,
'Twould be too much from my poor tale purloining
To give them each befitting flattery:
The sister was the tallest of the three,
The wife most buxom, but the mother's face
Beamed with such gentle humorous sanctity,
'Tis curious such a likeness I should trace
To old renowned Voltaire, nor can I such erase.

Her hair was silver-white, fluffed airily
Each side her brow, beneath which her black eyes
Danced as in fitful laughter fairily,
While from her mouth the sweetest smile did rise,
'Twas that which seemed the saint in Paradise;
Her hands were saint's hands, too, with love endowed;
Warm human love that quick could sympathize
In such sweet service modesty allowed,
Soft reverent hands they were, both humble and yet proud.

Don Pancho sometimes said in gallantry
He would long since have asked the daughter's hand
Had it not been his fancy was not free,
At which the mother to forbid the band
Laughed daintily, she seemed to understand
This bachelor, nor did she give him blame.
Her daughter wistful sometimes sadly scanned
His sunburned face whereon his will had tamed
The passions of his youth, now never even named.

Teresa she was called: tall, supple, sallow,
Devoted to her music and her books;
A quiet soul. Such as will always hallow
The home of growing years in quiet nooks;
Her youthful bloom had long since left her looks,
And yet she was not old, merely serene;
Her dress, pure white like lilies in calm brooks,
Gave her dark eyes and hair obsidian sheen,
That is in tranquil flow of sheltered waters seen.

Lucia, the wife, was buoyant, plump, and brown,
Luscious and sparkling as a full ripe cherry;
She loved rich colors, and from gold-combed crown
Down to her Turkish slippers she was merry,
Like pageant in the tales of Canterbury,
With fluttering silks of yellow, purple, red,
Her lips so pink, her teeth like milk in dairy,
One quite forgot to listen what she said,
Nor did she give rebuke though justly merited.

The conversation and affairs succeeding
Were much the same as you or I would know,
Provided we had station, wealth, and breeding,
Not different down in desert Mexico
From France, or England, or where e'er you go;
They had late books in science, fiction, travel,
Perhaps behind the times a week or so,
But having the same problems to unravel,
Proceeded to the tap of old Convention's gavel.

A glance into the kitchen may amuse us,
For kitchens ever are conservative;
And what the hall may formally refuse us
The serving quarters are more free to give;
If you would see the olden time still live
Enter the kitchen, with the cook converse,
The queen who reigns with ladle and with sieve
Holds more tradition than who rules with purse,
Or yet with fashion's sceptre, which is even worse.

This Mexic Hebe was a stately dame
Moving about in even majesty;
A princess conscious of her royal claim
Could hardly be more equipoised than she;
And who can well deny her high degree?
Who rules our stomach likewise rules our heart
Her privilege gets challenged not by me;
I too much honor culinary art
To couch a doubtful lance for weak patrician's part.

The kitchen was a white and roomy place
Embossed with copper dishes all arranged
In fancies equalling old Spanish lace,
If geometric patterns were exchanged
For floral ones. The sauce-pans all were ranged
Along the wall regarding shape and size,
And if one from the ranks should be estranged
It could be traced with sympathetic eyes
To where it graced the stove, whence savory odors rise.

The stove resembled more a holy shrine,
And this to me as well seems subtly fitting;
For what in truth could be held more divine -
But come, enough: let's back unto our knitting;
Blue tender flames are through the charcoal flitting.
The priestess brow is calm, the caldrons simmer,
No pinch of herbs or drop of oil omitting,
A gleam of peppers sets the stew aglimmer,
All in due time removed by wave of wand, or skimmer.

A wide arch, niched into the kitchen wall,
Shelved at convenient height, and decorated
With burnished brass and copper vessels, all
- Intended for some purpose antiquated;
The doors beneath the furnaces were grated,
Beneath them were arranged tongs, pokers, shovels,
And bellows, with chased silver richly plated,
For here is honor, even when one grovels
Amid such vulgar tools left commonly to hovels.

The comely priestess of exalted mien
With black locks plaited into placid coils
And cheeks like peonies set in between
Gold earrings green with clustered emeralds
Chants a low charm the while the caldron boils,
A chant of love and passion long ago,
Her purple robe no faintest blemish soils,
Her steps so even, silent, tranquil, slow,
She seems like planet calm that round the sun doth go.

Two satellites attend this orb celestial,
Shy, modest girls with fire-quicken'd eyes,
But deft of hand more fitted to our bestial
Ideas of all kitchen drudgeries.
In bowls of burnished brass of mighty size
They pour the water from the yellow gourds,
Cleansing the fruits their gardens justly prize,
Laying them out upon the sand-white boards,
A feast to greet the eye that jewel scarce affords.

An onion seems an unpoetic thing,
But when we look upon those glass-gold spheres
In which pale opal green is shadowing
Through crisping white just where the bud appears,
We cast aside all false esthetic fears
And sing the beauties that we see and love,
Nor lack we precedent of ancient years;
Was not the order given from above,
Enjoy the wealth of earth and all the fruits thereof?

And peppers red and green are like great jewels,
And egg-plants are the purple of the earth,
And leeks in white and green are sweet renewals
Of pledges that the waters give in birth;
And golden melons, bursting with their girth,
Roll against garnet beets, while cucumbers
Float in a bowl of water, whence the mirth
Of curling chicory the liquid stirs,
Fresh lipped with stinging kiss the oil but vaguely blurs.

I will not tell of fruits late carried in
To the wide dining-room arranged in order:
Pale apricot and glowing tangerine,
With grape and plum the pattern to embroider,
Pomegranates have been sung since first recorder,
Sang in the earliest days of exaltation;
The garments of the angels knew their border,
Their rubies laced in gold pass illustration.
And so I leave them all to your imagination.

Leaving the sweet-tiled floor we seek the stables,
An anticlimax; frankly I confess it;
Convenient though, for doing so enables
Us to reclaim our hero. You'd scarce guess it,
But 'tis the fact, and sometimes we must press it,
Our hero is a horse: and all this trouble
Is but to show what owner shall possess it;
I've written now until my back's bent double,
But soon 'twill come, I think, like bursting of a bubble.

The men are idly smoking cigarettes'
Along the benches, in the servant's court.
Seeming unconscious, though not one forgets
The possibility of gallant sport ;
The fountain of the kitchen is, in short,
In this same court-yard; here the maidens come
With heavy jar in graceful even port,
Set on the head, made steady by a thumb,
More to show grace of arm than keep the burden plumb.

So it is needful that the youths maintain
A graceful posture to set off their ease;
Their buckskin suits, cut in fantastic vein,
Are such as any damsel's heart must please;
The trousers, slightly flaring from the knees
Display a grace of hip, a strength of thigh;
Their short round jackets only serve to tease,
Through half concealing from the wistful eye
The charms of manly breasts that heave with amorous sigh.

Gregorio was trussed in olive-green
Broidered with yellow braid, but he was eating
A melon, and, to keep his trousers clean,
Stooped over hardly offering a greeting
To any glance, however soft entreating,
His fate was sealed as is already stated;
Nor was he for deceiving some fair sweeting,
Pretending that as yet he was not mated,
Such subterfuge, indeed, his honesty quite hated.

Miguel and Carlos, though staid married-men
Tricked out in silver-braid on rich maroon,
Still had an eye for seeing life again,
Man's heart is ever but a changing moon;
Together they a tender love-song croon,
Their silvered purple hats cocked on one side,
Life is but short and love so sweet a boon,
I hope you will o'erlook their foolish pride,
If wives can do as much, you should be satisfied.

But Marselino was the ever ready
To rise and give the girls the needed lift;
Those water jars prove often quite unsteady;
There is much danger in a little shift:
If black eyes dart a little love-glance swift,
They have the more effect from long curled lashes;
A little finger-touch scarce needs a shrift;
His teeth are white beneath his black moustaches,
And lips are merry flames for little starts and flashes.

He was dressed quietly in silver gray,
Of cloth, not buckskin, suiting more his station,
A sort of body-servant, one might say,
The fact itself sufficient elevation
To give him privilege beyond negation;
Then he was handsome and his voice so blended
Both strength and tenderness in modulation,
It was small wonder that the game soon ended,
And quivering bird was caught just as he had intended.

But modesty is strong, and custom strict,
And Marselino far from ruffianly;
And if his conscience never even pricked
It was because his thoughts from harm were free.
A glance, a touch, was all he took in fee;
He never could have dreamed of clasp or kiss;
'Twas not permitted maids of honesty,
And forms are binding in such things as this,
And any lover's speech decidedly amiss.

The Hebe of the kitchen, being matron,
Could favor him in any way she chose;
But I am not her priest nor her saint patron;
'Tis not for me her secrets to disclose.
'Twould be ungrateful if I thrust my nose
Into affairs out of pure love of prying.
Touch not my corns and I'll protect your toes:
An easy motto, always edifying,
And that she knew to cook there is no way denying.

So Marselino oft had little spread,
Which as his master's servant was his right;
And in his wisdom never lost his head
To seize forbidden fruit and take a bite;
If, just by chance, a gentle satellite
Should leave a finger sticking up an inch
In passing him a dish 'twas true he might
Just half unconscious give it little pinch,
But not to hurt at all. She would not even flinch.

But Hebe knew the weakness of young men;
She knew, too, strength of women, somewhat older;
She did not fly to jealous passion when
She chanced to be a casual beholder;
Nor did her cordiality grow colder;
She was a queen of women, as of cooks;
I know that many give her the cold shoulder,
But so I set her down among my books,
And calmly close the clasp, and latch the little hooks.

Within the parlor at the grand piano,
Sat sweet Teresa in virginity;
Her brother's wife, who sang a good soprano,
Beamed at her shoulder, buxom, matronly;
A sterile flower is beautiful to see;
A high-walled orchard has its fruiting charms;
But when a wild magnolia, standing free,
Waves in the winds its heavy odorous arms,
Why should youth run and hide with prudish false alarms.

It long has been our custom Puritanical
To call the body the soul's sacred temple;
Religion is inclined to be tyrannical,
And on her sister attributes to trample;
She always has traditional example,
And points with warning finger to a text;
Tradition having literature quite ample
To furnish maxims for all questions vexed,
If not in this world's law, they pop up in the next.

If bent on architectural illustration
Why were it not much better to be fair,
And look about amongst the house creation,
Admitting other buildings' being there;
Even a bawdy-house may have its share
In making up our physiology;
We hope the soul will make its visits rare;
The temple is the highest in degree,
But structures still have use in wide variety.

Much as we find the world so must we take it;
Happy is he who finds it passing good.
There are some egotists who think to make it
Conform into their own similitude;
We don't deny they give us spiritual food,
But food that some will eat and some will not;
And those who eat still have digestions crude,
And gastric juice or bile turns all to rot,
And rumbling arguments but make the blood grow hot.

Well, well, Don Pancho spent a happy week,
And then began to think of going home;
Companionship is pleasant thing to seek,
But soon grows stale to solitary gnome
Who holds bare rocks dearer than fertile loam;
There are such men and women, I believe,
Give them their will, and when they sometimes roam
Amid the crowd, be ready to receive
Their gifts of graciousness, nor for their absence grieve.

Men of the crowd talk from mere force of habit,
The recluse speaks but to express his thought;
A mountain trout will see a fly and nab it,
But not by shoals are bait-ideas caught;
My metaphor is somewhat dearly bought;
Nor was it, setting out, one of my wishes
To draw the nets of rhyme so tensely taut,
And liken all humanity to fishes,
Serving it up to you uncooked and without dishes.

But, being loth to see Don Paucho quit them,
A compromise was finally arranged
Of an excursion, which would thus permit them
To carry out a plan long since exchanged
Between them, and as many times deranged,
Of seeing the cliff-dwellings, justly famous,
'Tis but short time that we have been estranged
From their antiquity, but who can blame us
For giving ladies place as gallantry became us?

Now these same caves had been sought out for shelter
By shrewd Bernardo and his faithful charges;
The summer heat had made them well nigh swelter
Within the little canyon's narrow margins;
So they had hoisted sail on their free barges,
And by night journeys, safe and yet romantic,
Soughi new experience, which well enlarges
The mind of youth and keeps it out of frantic
Monstrosities of growth or moody morbid antic.

Behold now, then, our little forces gather
Into the tableau of the final act.
I'm loth to give them up, preferring rather
To write another canto, that's a fact.
But I foresee my readers all have backed
Into a corner, righteously indignant;
And since my apparatus is all packed,
I'll give you nod and smile and look benignant,
Thus warding off your wrath and darkening frown malignant.

The time, then, sunset, and the final place,
The little camp among the doming rocks;
Tents for retiring, and their fronting space
Gaily upholstered like a royal box
In the wide theatre the sun unlocks;
Now he is closing up, the play near done;
The little group of friends, quite orthodox,
Are making bustle trying to put on
Their coats and wraps and hats to interrupt the fun.

When straight from out the pausing yellow disk,
Straight from the golden rays full down the stage
With many a gay curvet and sprightly frisk
A golden horse bearing a golden page,
No bridle check or cord his pace to gauge,
A naked laughing boy with arms outspread,
A vision worthy of an ancient mage,
His beaming locks tossing upon his head
In flaming aureole, a glittering radiance shed,

Down, down he came, the spirit of Apollo,
Bounding across the daisy-sprinkled earth,
Skimming the wind like white celestial swallow
Giving their wonder and their laughter birth.
Don Pancho hears a peal of witches' mirth,
As gracefully the gentle steed makes bow;
The sun drops down behind horizon's girth,
Having completed thus his freedom's vow,
He bids you all good night as we do even now.

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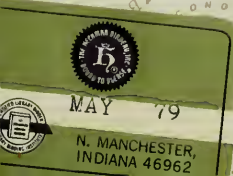
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BY THE SAME WRITER

A SHIP OF SOULS
NEW SONGS FOR OLD
IN AN OLD MAN'S GARDEN
THE PASSING YEAR

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